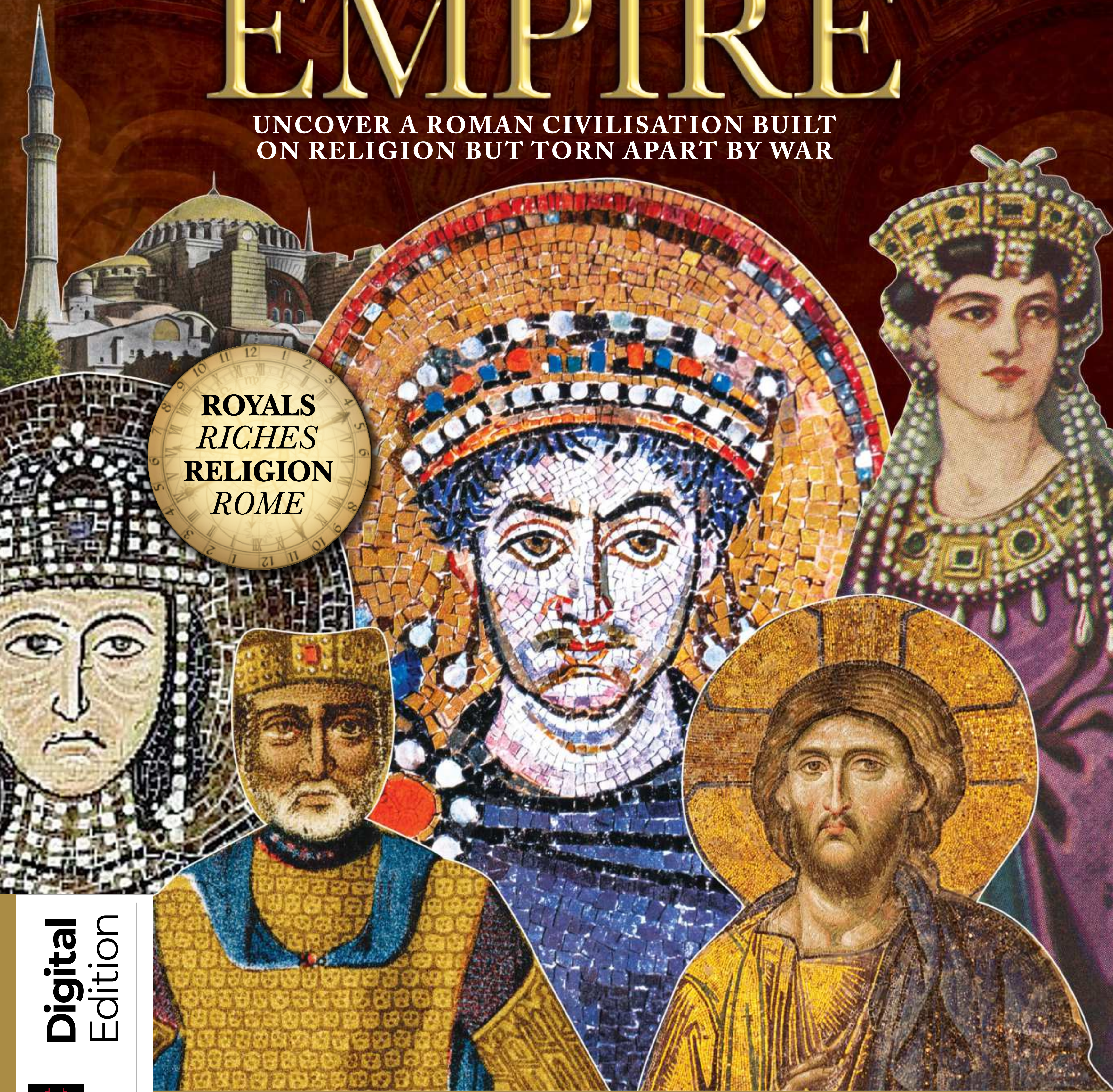
NEW

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

BYZANTINE EMPIRE

UNCOVER A ROMAN CIVILISATION BUILT ON RELIGION BUT TORN APART BY WAR



ROYALS
RICHES
RELIGION
ROME

EMPEROR JUSTINIAN ◆ **VARANGIAN GUARD** ◆ **HAGIA SOPHIA**

Digital Edition

FUTURE

THIRD EDITION

WELCOME TO

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

Known for its beautiful buildings, glittering jewellery and fervent religiosity, the Byzantine Empire actually viewed itself as Roman. They believed the city of Constantinople (or Byzantium) was the new capital of the mighty Roman Empire, after its Western portion had fallen to barbarians. Constantinople's glory is certainly fitting of a wealthy Roman city, but how much do we really know about this fascinating society, which lasted for 1000 years after its predecessor's demise?

All About History's Book of the Byzantine Empire explores the origins of the empire, and how it grew to become a beacon of stability, even when it was surrounded by kingdoms in chaos. Learn why Constantinople developed into the wealthiest city in the world, and what its citizens did on their days off. Get inside the minds of Byzantium's greatest thinkers, before exploring why Orthodox Christianity was the form of Christianity adopted throughout the Byzantine Empire.

With beautiful mosaics, artefacts and artworks to admire, you'll get a sense of the opulence of Byzantium by pouring through these pages. Perhaps most importantly, though, you can study the emperors and empresses that made the Byzantine world the longest-lasting Christian empire in history.

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FUTURE

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

BYZANTINE EMPIRE

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THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

CONTENTS

08 TIMELINE OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

KEY FIGURES

12 ROYAL DYNASTIES
Get to know the 12 ruling dynasties of the Byzantine Empire

14 JUSTINIAN'S QUEST
The Western Empire may have fallen in 476, but was it too late to return to the glory days of Rome?

22 EMPRESS THEODORA
As a courtesan who had become queen, Justinian's wife Theodora was both loved and reviled

28 MURDEROUS RULERS
At the heart of the Byzantine Empire was a monarchy that survived on deception and bloodthirsty violence

30 IRENE OF ATHENS
The first woman to reign over the Romans alone, Irene ruled in spectacular fashion

34 BASIL II
Basil II emerged from an early failure as a legendary empire builder and feared warlord

40 INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE
Eight Byzantine men who made a big impact on linguistics, law, medicine, architecture and religion

44 ANNA KOMNENE
The life and work of Byzantium's greatest female author

RELIGION

50 RELIGION OF NEW ROME
How Christianity defined and divided the Byzantine Empire

52 THE EMPIRE'S FINEST ART
Take a close look at Basilica San Vitale's most beautiful mosaics

54 THE GREAT SCHISM
The religious schism of 1054 was the longest and bloodiest disagreement in Church history

60 MOUNT ATHOS
The holy peninsula where the flame of Byzantine monastic life still burns

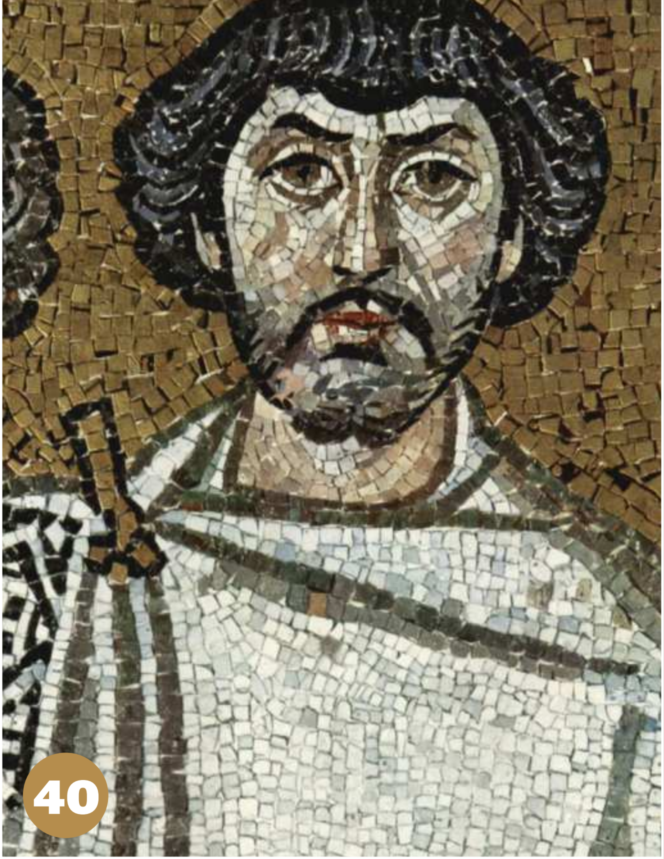
DAILY LIFE

66 CONSTANTINOPLE THROUGH TIME
The story of the Queen of Cities, the Byzantine capital destined to change history forever

72 INSIDE HAGIA SOPHIA
Peek inside the most iconic building on Constantinople's glorious skyline

74 THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL
From eyeliner to ivory boxes, the Byzantines took pride in their appearance, as these artefacts show

76 THE BLUES AND THE GREENS
In Byzantium, sport really was a matter of life and death



40

14

90

80 DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CHARIOT RACER
Follow a charioteer from morning til night, as he sees success (or failure) in the Hippodrome

WARFARE

84 FIRST SIEGE OF CONSTANTINOPLE
After the Muslim conquest of the Sassanid Empire, the fate of Europe lay in the hands of Constantinople

88 WIN A WAR WITH GREEK FIRE
Defend the Byzantine capital by searing enemy ships with this fearsome incendiary to burn your way to victory

90 THE EMPEROR'S NORTHMEN
The extraordinary story of how Vikings became the bodyguards of the emperors of Byzantium

98 THE BATTLE OF MANZIKERT
The ferocious battle that meant the beginning of the end for the Byzantine Empire

DOWNFALL

104 BYZANTIUM IN THE CRUSADES
How the so-called 'Holy Wars' became the death knell for the greatest city in Christendom

112 THE ROMAN EMPIRE'S LAST STAND
The Ottomans dreamed of seizing Constantinople. In 1453, both sides prepared for a decisive showdown

120 WHAT DID THE BYZANTINES DO FOR US?
The Byzantine legacy – from the Renaissance to religion, language, law and… forks

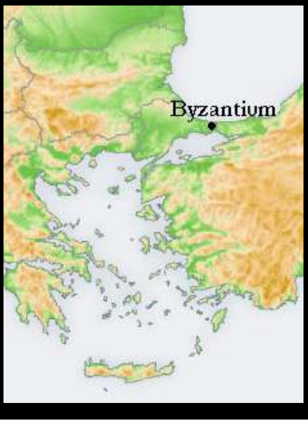
Byzantine Empire

Modern historians use the name 'Byzantine Empire' but the citizens identified themselves as Romans

Uncover the extraordinary rise and fall of one of the world's greatest empires, as it buckled under the weight of internal conflict and foreign invasions

BYZANTIUM IS BORN

Greek colonists founded a city on the European side of the Bosporus Strait. Strategically placed between Europe and Asia Minor, Byzantium prospered, though the Greeks and Persians warred over it many times.



657 BCE

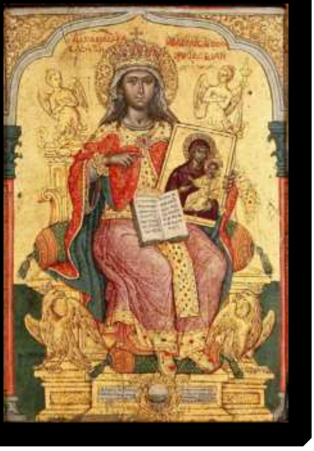
NEW ROME

Emperor Constantine the Great moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium to better manage its eastern frontiers. Endowed by his name, the new capital was rechristened Constantinople.

330 CE

RESTORATION OF ICONS

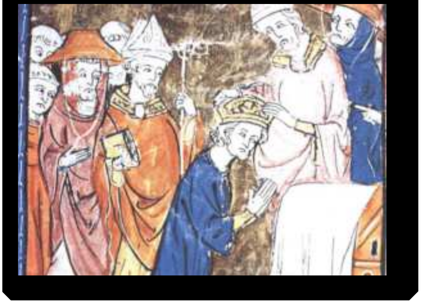
After another period of iconoclasm took hold in 814, Empress Theodora, regent for her son Michael III, finally ended the practice. Her efforts led to her canonisation as a saint.



843

HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

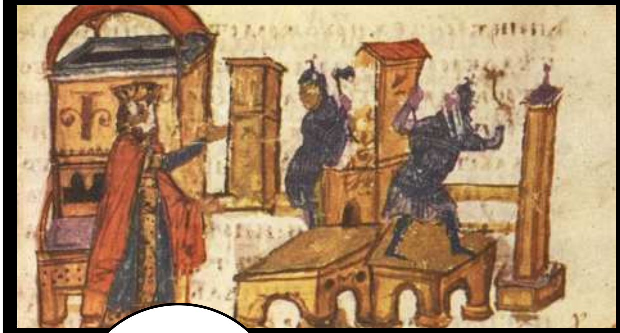
Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman emperor in an attempt to restore the Western Roman Empire. It frustrated the East, who felt that their power was being threatened.



800

RISE OF ICONOCLASM

Emperor Leo III made the veneration of religious icons illegal across the empire, something that continued after his death. This vexed the Western Church, which supported their use.

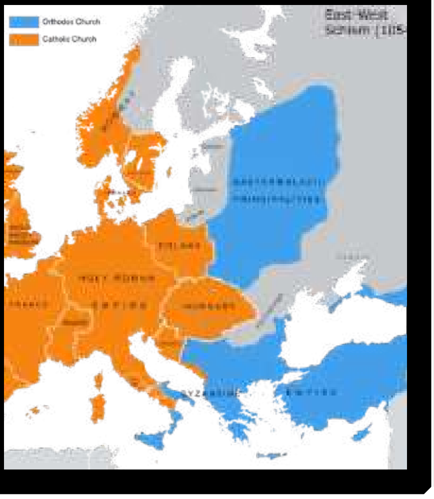


726-87

The period between iconoclasm and the sack of Constantinople was a high point for Byzantine art

THE GREAT SCHISM

After years of disputes, the Church formally separated into the Roman Catholic Church in the West, led by Pope Leo IX, and the Greek Orthodox Church, which was based in Constantinople.



1054

SACK OF CONSTANTINOPLE

After the Fourth Crusade helped put exiled Emperor Alexios IV on the throne, the Byzantines refused to pay. Angered, the Crusaders conquered the capital and established a new Latin Empire.

1204

PLUNDERING AWAY

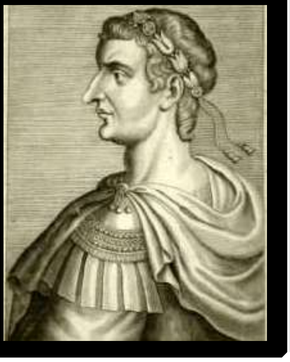
20,000 Estimated number of men in the Crusader army

Number of ships used in the sacking **200**

57 Number of years the Latin Empire survived

1204

A PERMANENT SPLIT



Upon the death of Emperor Theodosius I, his two sons, Arcadius and Honorius, inherited the Eastern and the Western halves of the Roman Empire respectively. The empire would never be reunited.

395 CE

PAYING THE HUNS

Amount of gold the Byzantines paid the Huns annually to keep them at bay **159KG**

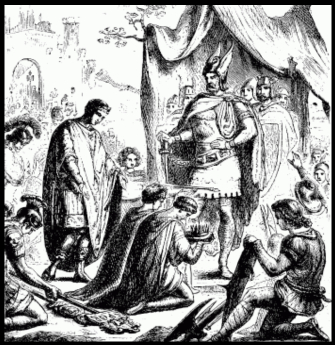
318KG The tribute had doubled by 433 as Attila rose to power

The amount trebled in 443 after the empire was heavily defeated by the Huns **952KG**

424-43 CE

THE WEST FALLS

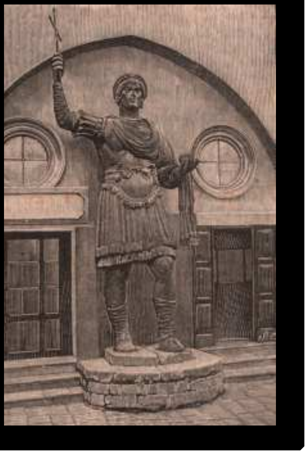
The overthrow of Romulus Augustus by the barbarian Odoacer marked the end of Western Roman Empire. However, Odoacer bent the knee to Constantinople and Eastern Rome endured for another 1,000 years.



476 CE

IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME!

Emperor Heraclius introduced Greek as the official language of the empire's administration. By the next generation, knowledge of Latin was rare, even among the educated.

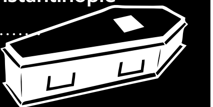


620

THE JUSTINIAN PLAGUE

25-50 MILLION
Number of estimated deaths across the empire

10,000 Approximate number of deaths daily in Constantinople

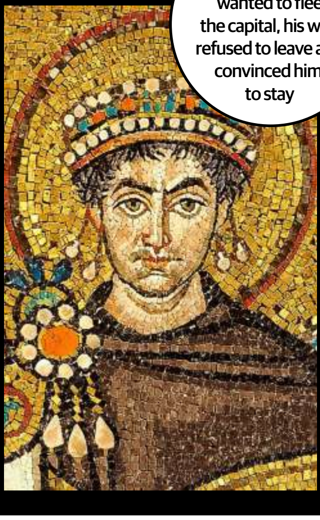


3 Number of major outbreaks of bubonic plague with this being the first, followed by the Black Death and the Third Pandemic

541-42

THE NIKA RIOTS

Justinian I's harsh treatment of hooligans at a chariot race, as well as anger at a recent tax hike, sparked five days of rioting that killed a tenth of Constantinople.

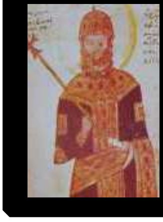


While Justinian wanted to flee the capital, his wife refused to leave and convinced him to stay

532

RESTORED TO POWER

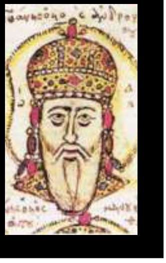
Emperor Michael VIII successfully recaptured Constantinople and caused the Latin Emperor, Baldwin II, to flee the city. Michael restored the capital, which had fallen into disrepair, back to its former grandeur.



1261

INTERNAL STRIFE

A series of civil wars among dynastic rivals during the reign of Emperor John V severely weakened the empire and left it vulnerable to attacks from enemies abroad.



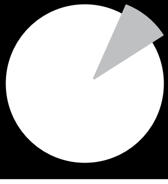
1321-79

POPULATION OF CONSTANTINOPLE

400,000 Estimated number of pre-plague inhabitants during the 6th century

70,000 Number of people who lived in the capital after its recapture during the 13th century

The population of the 15th century was just

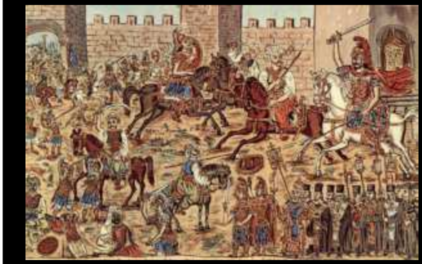


10% of the size it was in the 6th

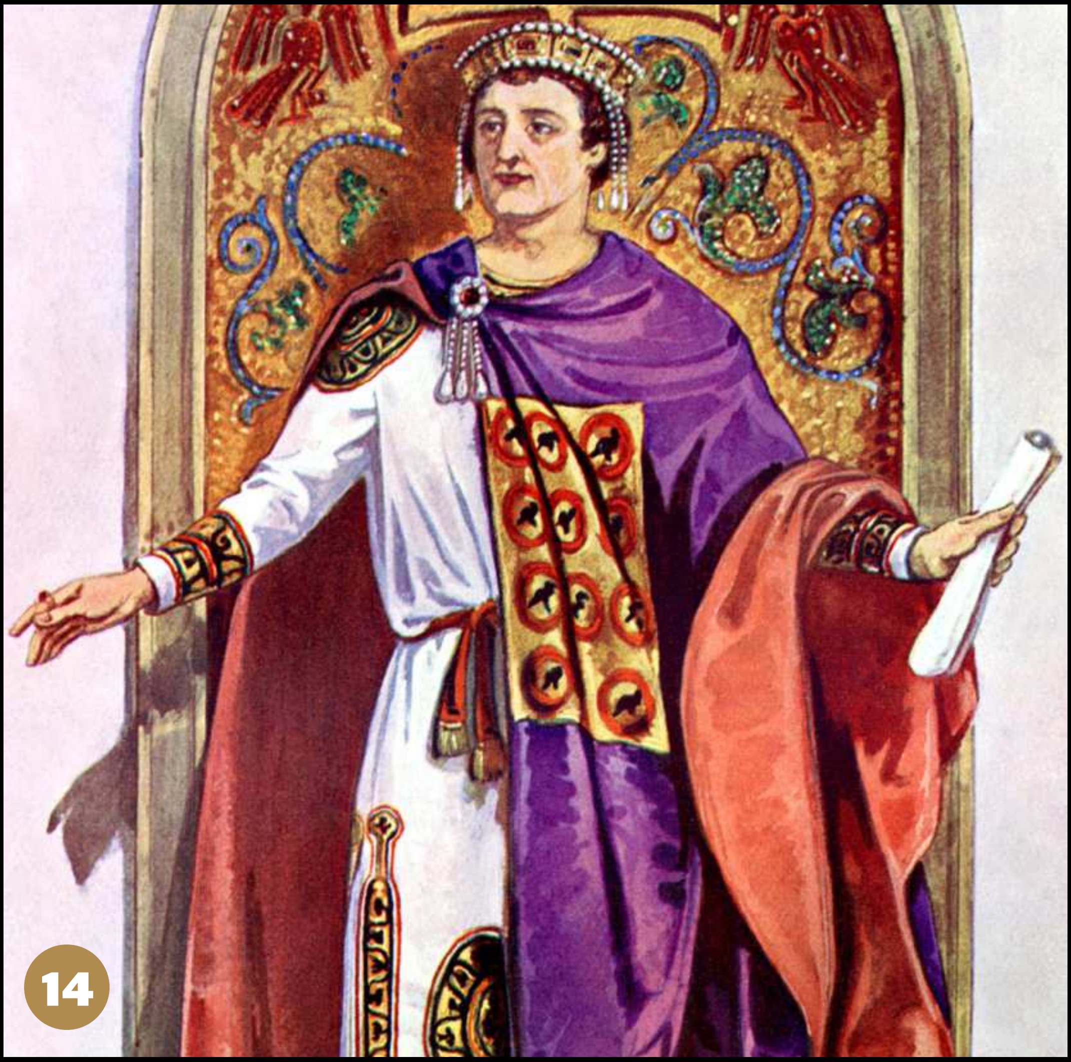
1400

END OF AN EMPIRE

The army of Sultan Mehmed II killed Emperor Constantine XI as the Ottoman Turks successfully captured the capital. The event marked the end of the Byzantine Empire.



1453



KEY FIGURES

12 **ROYAL DYNASTIES**
Get to know the 12 ruling dynasties of the Byzantine Empire

14 **JUSTINIAN'S QUEST**
The Western Empire may have fallen in 476, but was it too late to return to the glory days of Rome?

22 **EMPRESS THEODORA**
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28 **MURDEROUS RULERS**
At the heart of the Byzantine Empire was a monarchy that survived on deception and bloodthirsty violence

30 **IRENE OF ATHENS**
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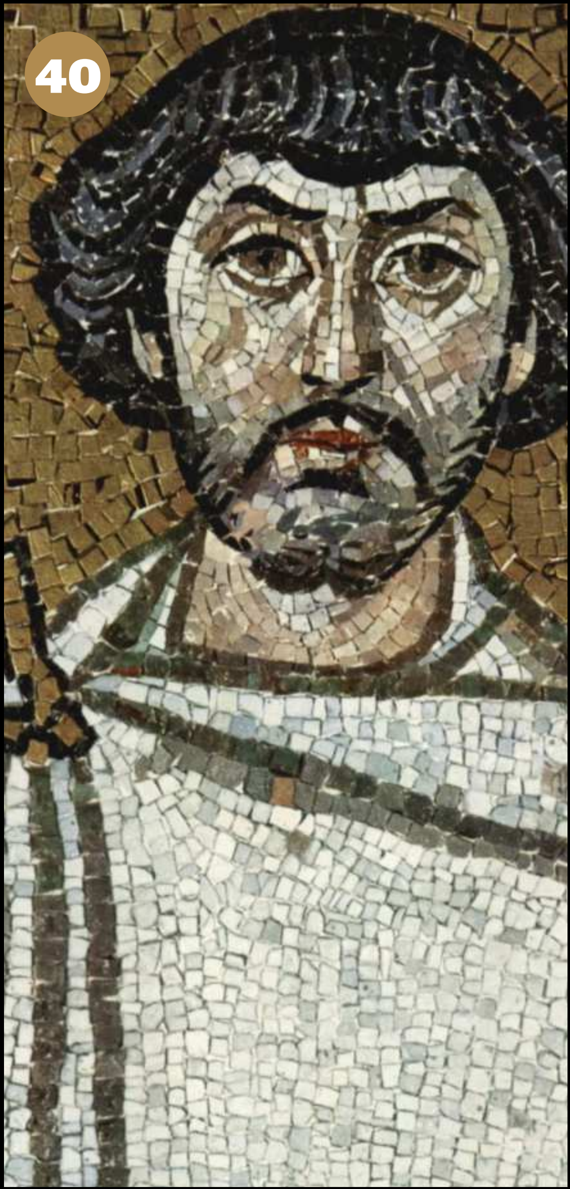
34 **BASIL II**
Basil II emerged from an early failure as a legendary empire builder and feared warlord

40 **INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE**
Eight extraordinary Byzantine men who made a big impact on linguistics, law, medicine, architecture and religion

44 **ANNA KOMNENE**
The life and work of Byzantium's greatest female author

30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ROYAL DYNASTIES

ARCADIUS
395-408

THEODOSIAN DYNASTY

379-457

The successful early years of the Byzantine Empire contrasted with the struggles faced by the rulers of Rome. A thriving economy allowed Constantinople to be fortified with huge walls, while extra cash was used to pay off potential invaders and employ mercenaries, including some of the Huns who sacked Rome.

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THEODOSIUS II
408-450

Following the death of Emperor Theodosius I in 395, the two halves of the Roman Empire were split between his two sons, marking the beginning of the Byzantine Empire in the East.

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LEO I
457-474

LEONID DYNASTY

457-518

Leo I, the first of the Leonid dynasty, was put on the throne by Aspar, a powerful Gothic general serving in the Byzantine forces who expected him to be a puppet ruler. Instead a power struggle broke out that ended with Aspar's assassination in 471. The Leonids ruled for another 47 years.

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ZENO
474-475, 476-491

Although Emperor Zeno was briefly deposed by an uncle, his 17-year reign ultimately consolidated Byzantine imperial power at the same time as the line of Western emperors came to an end.

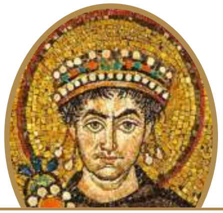
JUSTIN I
518-527

JUSTINIAN DYNASTY

518-602

The Byzantine Empire entered its first golden age under the Justinians. The military campaigns of Justinian I – often known as Justinian the Great – attempted to reconquer the West and saw the Byzantine Empire reach its greatest extent, with North Africa, Italy and southern Spain coming under the control of Constantinople.

Justinian's successors inherited an overstretched and bankrupt empire, leading to inevitable contraction, a situation not helped by Justin II being sidelined by regents due to mental illness.



JUSTINIAN I THE GREAT
527-565

HERACLIUS
610-641

HERACLIAN DYNASTY

610-695

Heraclius seized the throne from another usurper, Emperor Phocas, and began a new dynasty of six rulers, although his successors did not enjoy an easy ride. One was allegedly poisoned by his wife, one was deposed by the Senate, one was assassinated, one died of dysentery, while the final emperor was ousted in a revolt.

CONSTANS II
641-668

Justinian II was deposed by the military and mutilated, hence his nickname Justinian the Slit-nosed, but regained the throne during a long civil war – only to be kicked out by the army a second time.

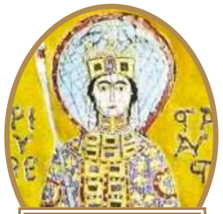
LEO III
717-741

ISAURIAN DYNASTY

717-802

The elevation of Leo III to the imperial throne brought to an end the instability of the 20 Years' Anarchy, but the new emperor and his successors had to constantly manage the military threats from two growing powers – the new Arab Caliphate and the Franks – with Charlemagne being crowned a rival Holy Roman Emperor in 800.

Empress Irene violently deposed her son to take the throne and was herself overthrown in a coup five years later, but not before reintroducing the veneration of icons that had been banned by the Isaurians.



IRENE OF ATHENS
797-802

NIKEPHORIAN DYNASTY

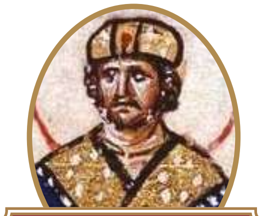
802-813

The three emperors of the short-lived Nikephorian era never had a secure grip on power: the first died in battle, his successor abdicated within a year due to wounds suffered in the same battle, the third meekly abdicated rather than face down a probable revolt against him.

MICHAEL II
820-829

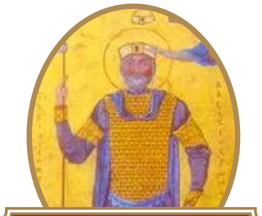
AMORIAN DYNASTY
820-867

Amorians Michael II and Theophilus continued the practice of iconoclasm that had re-emerged under the dynasty's predecessor, Leo V, until Empress Theodora – acting as regent for her infant son, Michael III – brought it to a permanent end. The Amorians also brought much-needed political stability, introducing a landholding system similar to European feudalism.



MICHAEL III THE DRUNKARD
842-867

Michael III acceded the throne at the age of two and gained the unfortunate nickname of Michael the Drunkard due to his pleasure-loving lifestyle.



BASIL II THE BULGAR SLAYER
976-1025

MACEDONIAN DYNASTY
867-1057

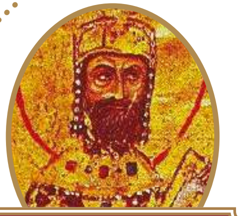
Nearly two centuries of Macedonian rule saw a renaissance in Byzantine art and culture since the Empire, though smaller in extent than in the 7th century, was stable and well protected. The final years of the dynasty saw the Great Schism between the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox faiths.

Two of the Byzantine Empire's four female rulers were sisters of the Macedonian dynasty. They even sat on the throne together as co-rulers: Zoe (1028-1050) and Theodora (1042-1056).

THEODORA
1042-1056

DOUKID DYNASTY
1059-1081

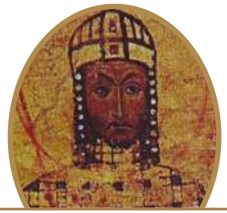
Selected by the preceding emperor as his heir, Constantine X Doukas took the throne to begin the Doukid dynasty in a relatively peaceful transition. However, the rest of the Doukid era was anything but peaceful, with the loss of almost all Asia Minor to the Seljuk Turks.



ALEXIOS I KOMNENOS
1081-1118

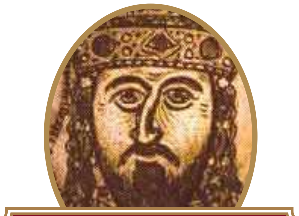
KOMNENID DYNASTY
1057-1059 and 1081-1185

Isaac I Komnenos's short-lived reign as the first Komnenid emperor ended in 1059, but not for another 22 years would his family return to power by marrying into the intervening Doukid dynasty. Alexios I Komnenos's appeal for military aid against the Turks stimulated the First Crusade, and the holy wars that followed would dictate the future of the Byzantine Empire.



MANUEL I KOMNENOS THE GREAT
1143-1180

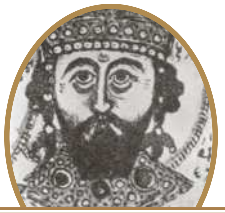
The last Komnenid emperor, Andronikos I Komnenos, was brutally executed by a mob in Constantinople after news emerged that he planned to wipe out the aristocracy to preserve his place on the throne.



ISAAC II ANGELOS
1185-1195 AND 1203-1204

ANGELID DYNASTY
1185-1204

The succession of the Angelid emperors to the Byzantine throne saw the beginning of the Empire's terminal decline. Military weakness and financial insolvency led to the loss of Turkish territory to the Sultanate of Rum, and European lands to the Bulgarian Empire and Kingdom of Hungary.

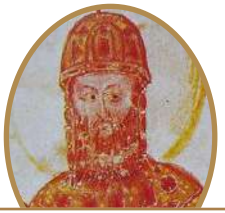


ALEXIOS III ANGELOS
1195-1203

Anti-Western policies under the Angelids led to the seizure of Constantinople by soldiers of the Fourth Crusade and the overthrow of Alexios IV Angelos, the final emperor of the dynasty.

LASKARID DYNASTY
1204-1261

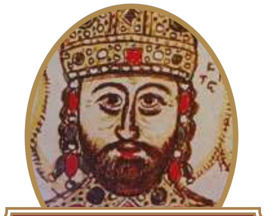
The four Laskarids were Byzantine rulers without Byzantium. With Constantinople under Latin rule, Theodore I Laskaris fled to Asia Minor and established the Empire of Nicaea, the largest and strongest of the Byzantine Empire's three rump states.



MICHAEL VIII PALAIOLOGOS
1259-1282

PALAIOLOGAN DYNASTY
1261-1453

The final Byzantine dynasty was also its longest lasting, with both the start and end of the Palaiologan era marked by the capture of Constantinople: the reconquest of the city from the Latin crusaders in 1261 by Michael VIII Palaiologos and the loss of the city under Constantine XI Dragases Palaiologos to the Ottomans in 1453.



CONSTANTINE XI DRAGASES PALAIOLOGOS
1448-1453

One of several Palaiologan emperors deposed in civil wars, John VI Palaiologos nonetheless survived his fall from power and lived for 29 more years in monastic retirement.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

JUSTINIAN'S QUEST

The Western Empire may have fallen in 476, but was it too late to return to the glory days of Rome?

Written by Jon Wright

The emperor Justinian never lacked admirers. Some of them lapsed into sycophancy. "You have a dignity beyond all others," wrote Pope Agapetus, and "it was in the likeness of the heavenly kingdom that God gave you the earthly rule, that you might teach men the protection of justice and drive away the howling of those who rave against it". Justinian would often be remembered as one of the towering figures of early Byzantine history: the law-maker, the reformer, the ruler who launched bold initiatives to win back territories in the west. On the other hand, some would portray him as the man who embarked upon pointless, costly military misadventures and left behind a toxic legacy. The emperor's contemporaries couldn't quite decide which analysis was correct, and historians continue to squabble about Justinian's merits and flaws.

> Justinian came from humble origins, but one of the hallmarks of the empire was that merit counted for more than birth

Justinian was born around the year 482 in Tauresium. He came from relatively humble origins, but one of the emerging hallmarks of the empire was that merit often counted for more than accidents of birth when it came to acquiring the top jobs. Justinian was sent to Constantinople by his uncle Justin to receive a suitably well-rounded education. Then, as luck would have it, Justin rocketed up the political pecking order and became emperor in 518. Justinian benefited, and in 521 he was appointed consul, with special responsibility for the eastern armies. By 527 he had risen to the role of co-emperor, and following Justin's death in the same year, Justinian was left in sole charge of guiding the ship of state.

War on all fronts

From the outset Justinian was obliged to confront daunting military challenges. The emperor was no kind of soldier, and he was usually to be found tucked up in a palace in Constantinople: he was marked, in historian Edward Gibbon's phrase, by the "cold ambition which delights in war and declines the dangers of the field". This, as it goes, was not unusual - emperors typically preferred the sidelines - but the crucial decisions and military appointments were still Justinian's to make.

The emperor was fortunate in many ways. He had significant resources at his disposal and his subjects, for the most part, accepted that half of the empire's income should be devoted to the military budget. Building chains of fortresses along the borders with Persia and the Balkans to repel would-be invaders made excellent sense, after all. Having one in 30 adult males in military service was deemed to be a necessity during such turbulent times. But the system was far from perfect. During some campaigns, huge distances were involved, so it was difficult to maintain supply chains. When the empire went through tough financial times, soldiers wages were slow to arrive: this led to no few desertions - a constant thorn in the imperial side. All told, however, the military machine worked tolerably well. The trickier issue was determining how it ought to be deployed.

When Justinian came to the throne a comet is said to have appeared in the skies above

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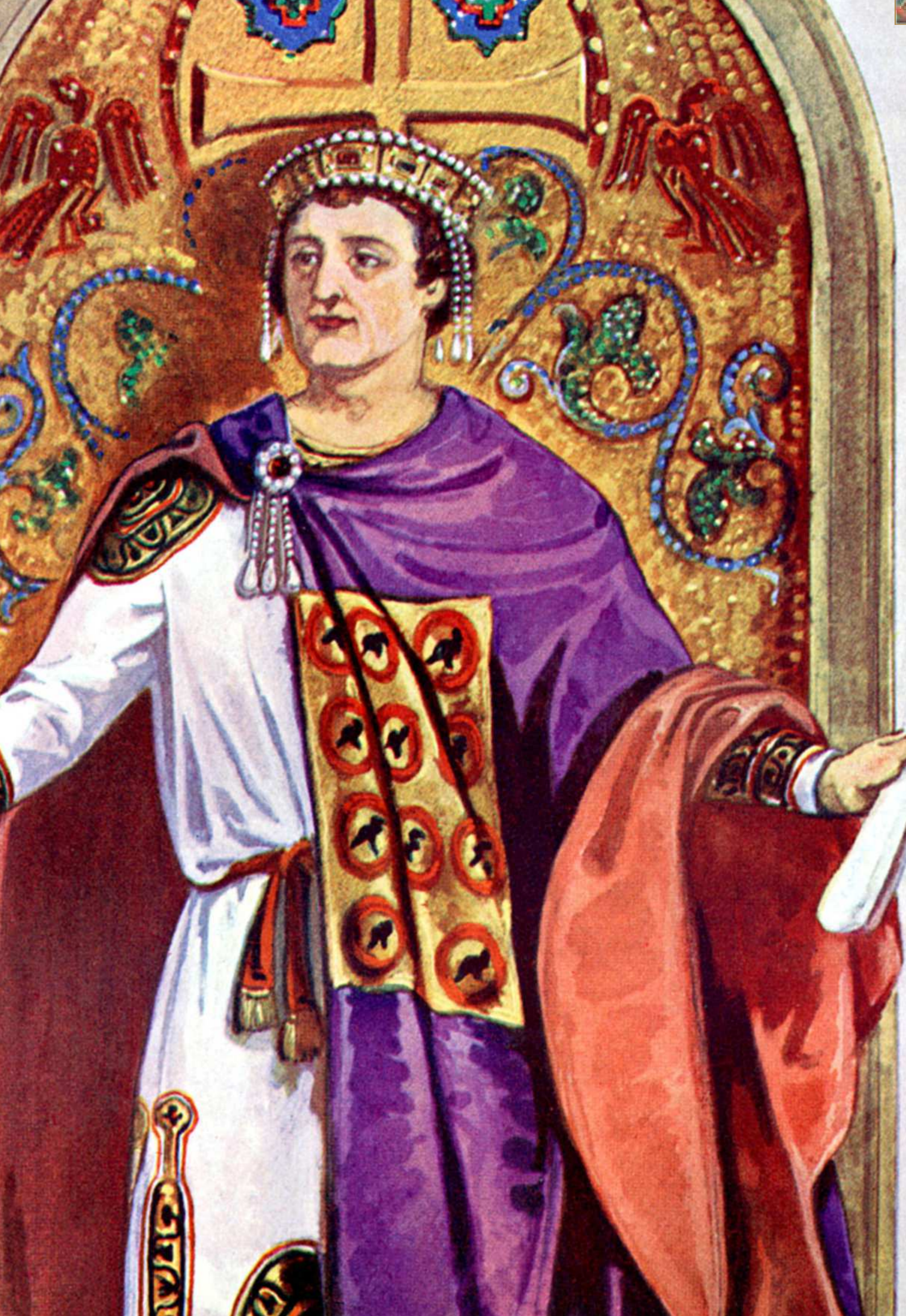


Belisarius

Justinian was not an emperor who fought his own battles, but he had excellent instincts when choosing his general

Flavius Belisarius, born around the year 500, was the stuff of legend. His early adventures in the campaigns against the Persians were a hit-and-miss affair, but his reputation soared in the wake of the North African wars. Traditionally conquering heroes had returned to Rome and been rewarded with a 'triumph' – a lavish celebration of their deeds. Such festivities had not taken place for several centuries, but an exception was made for Belisarius. He strode into Constantinople and the crowds cheered at the procession.

Initial successes in Italy enhanced Belisarius' reputation but, as the tide turned against the empire in the 540s, his position became less secure. Justinian seems to have worried about his general's ambitions and, rather churlishly, resented Belisarius' popularity. The general was called home and, after being pardoned in the wake of a corruption trial, resumed his military career in a less spectacular role.

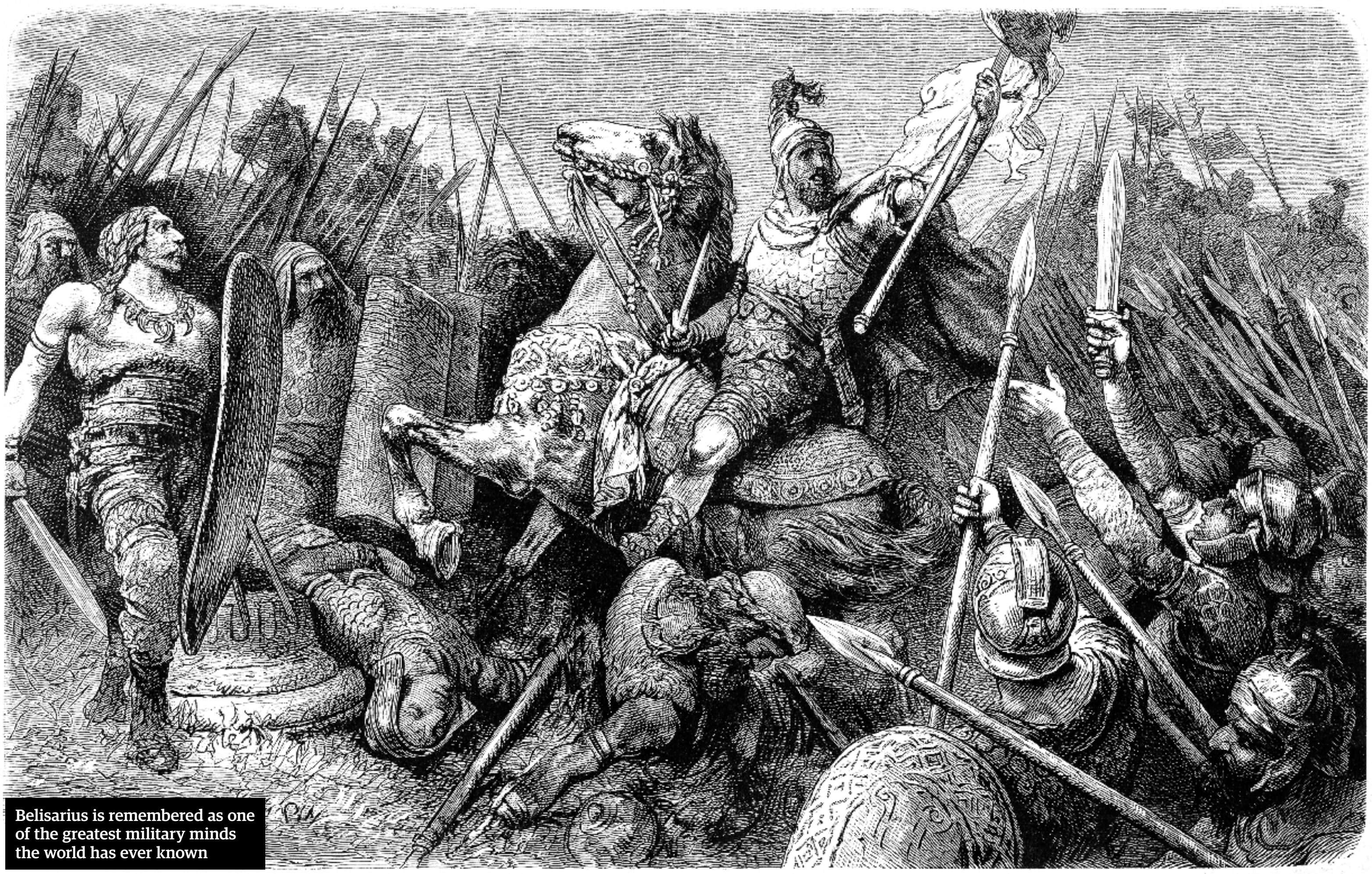
He was often portrayed as conciliatory and willing to take advice from his underlings, and is said to have been relatively merciful. Procopius writes of him ordering his troops not to burn agricultural land or loot the cities of the empire's foes. That said, his savage treatment of the rebels involved in the 532 Nika riots demonstrates that Belisarius' compassion had limits.

Constantinople. The crowds, according to Gibbon, "gazed with astonishment" and "expected wars and calamities from [its] baleful influence". "These expectations," wrote Gibbon, "were abundantly fulfilled." But there were triumphs, too. Justinian is usually depicted as an emperor obsessed with grabbing back the old heartlands of the Western Roman empire. He certainly devoted a good deal of time to the task, but a nuanced analysis is required. During the early years of his reign Justinian does not appear to have been particularly concerned with the west. He had more urgent tasks at hand: dealing with troublemakers in the Balkans and, more pressingly, confronting an old enemy of Rome, the Persian Sassanid empire, now in the capable hands of Khosrow I. Battles were won and lost, and by 532 both sides agreed that further conflict was futile. An 'eternal peace' was agreed upon; however, it only lasted for eight-or-so years.

Still, this respite allowed Justinian to look westwards. The mistake would be to assume that the emperor adopted an obsessive, come-what-may attitude to recapturing old Roman territories. Rather than pursuing a romantic dream, Justinian was careful to strike only when promising opportunities arose. At every turn glory was sought because it conferred political legitimacy, not because of some overwhelming sense of duty to the memory of Rome.

North Africa was the first major theatre of conflict, and it was very much a one-act play: stunning victories were secured in no time at all. The Vandals had dominated the region since taking Carthage in 439 and had expanded their sphere of influence as far as Corsica, Sardinia and the Balearics. In order for Justinian to make inroads, a little luck was required, and this arrived during the early 530s. Gelimer overthrew Hilderic as ruler of the region in 530, which created a decidedly tense political situation. Into the bargain, rebellions in Tripolitania and Sardinia were useful distractions that drew away Vandal troops. If Justinian was ever going to strike, this was the moment. Predictably enough, Byzantine troops under the redoubtable military leader Belisarius arrived on the North African coastline: ten thousand infantrymen, five thousand cavalry and a thousand archers.

> An 'eternal peace' with the Persian Sassanid empire was agreed upon; however, it only lasted for eight-or-so-years



Belisarius is remembered as one of the greatest military minds the world has ever known

© Getty Images

PATRIBVSIS
TAMEIS·OFFERO
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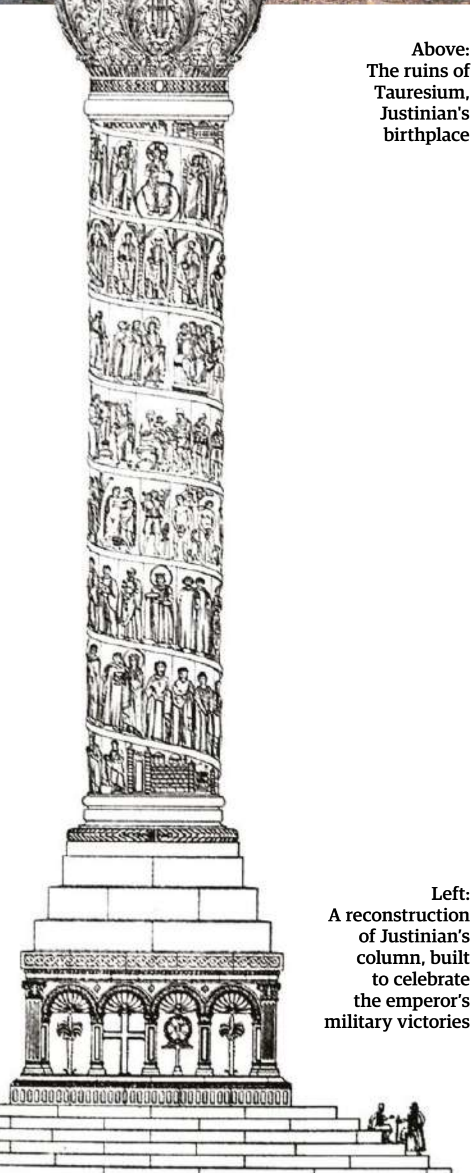
Ivory diptychs were one of the era's great art forms. This example celebrates Justinian's rise to the role of consul

Above: The ruins of Tauresium, Justinian's birthplace



Left: A reconstruction of Justinian's column, built to celebrate the emperor's military victories

> "Byzantine troops under the redoubtable military leader Belisarius arrived on the North African coastline"

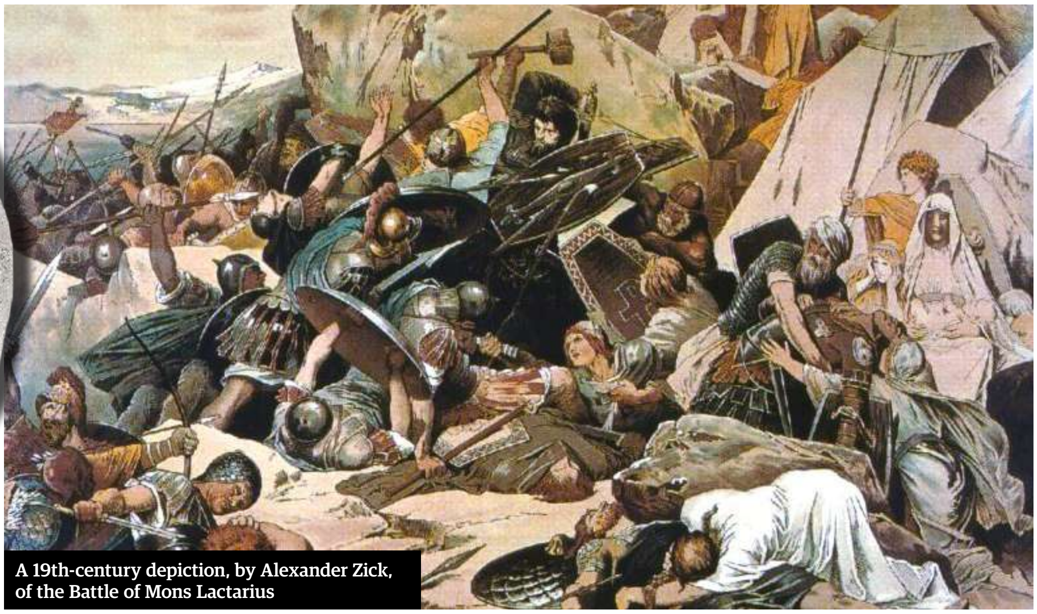
The Vandals' defences were vulnerable, and after securing an easy victory at Ad Decimum in September 533, Carthage was captured. The battle at Tricamarum in December solidified a swift and almost total Byzantine triumph.

Local Berber resistance would linger for decades, but Justinian was off to an excellent start. Procopius, a chronicler who also served as adviser to Belisarius and witnessed events first hand, recognised that good fortune had played its part: "Whether this happened by chance or because of valour one would justly marvel at it." Justinian was eager to put success down to divine approval and he implored his subjects to "bear witness to the victories granted to us by the will of heaven".

Eyes now turned to a more complex military objective, the reconquest of Italy, which would dominate Byzantine military affairs between 535 and 554. Just as the Vandals had supplanted Rome in North Africa, so Odoacer had gained dominance in the Italian peninsula. The tide began to turn in the 490s when Odoacer was defeated by the Ostrogoth Theodoric. In theory Theodoric was a client-ruler for the Byzantines, but he exhibited a fiercely independent streak, much to Byzantine dismay. When he died in 526, another opportunity for extending the empire's influence in the west presented itself. Initially, the infant Athalaric took the helm, though the true source of power was his mother, Amalasuntha. Upon Athalaric's death in 534, Amalasuntha offered to make Theodahad her co-monarch, but he proved to be something of an ingrate, having his benefactor killed at the first opportunity. This outrage gave Byzantium the perfect excuse to intervene.

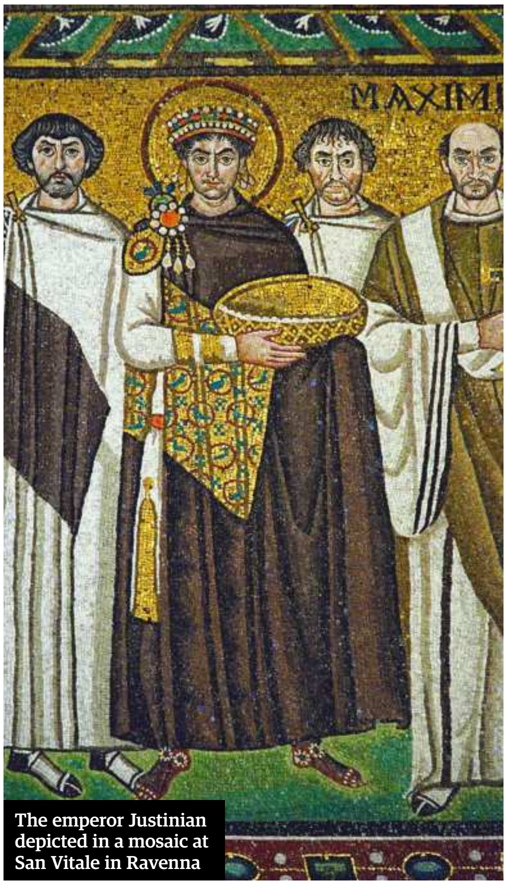
Belisarius began well, capturing Sicily with ease in 535. After a few setbacks, Dalmatia also came under Byzantine control. Over the next five years impressive progress was made. Naples and Rome were secured in 536, and subsequently a long siege of Rome was repelled. A number of less glorious episodes also entered the historical annals – the slaughter of Byzantine troops in Milan, for instance – but by 540, the year in which Ravenna was regained, the Byzantine position appeared to be secure. The Gothic king Vitigis was captured and

The Persian ruler Khosrow I, one of Justinian's most determined enemies, depicted on a Sassanid silver coin


A 19th-century depiction, by Alexander Zick, of the Battle of Mons Lactarius

packed off to Constantinople. Only a handful of Gothic strongholds, including Verona, remained.

The plain-sailing quickly became more stormy. Old rivalries with Persia drew Byzantine attention away from the western reconquest. The Sassanids launched a series of daring, frequently successful attacks on the Byzantines' eastern territories. Antioch was sacked in 540 and Edessa was besieged in 544. Manpower also became a troubling issue, courtesy of a devastating plague that descended on the empire. With an ounce or two of exaggeration, Procopius recalled that "the whole human race came close to being annihilated", but the death toll was, assuredly, extremely high.



The emperor Justinian depicted in a mosaic at San Vitale in Ravenna

This was all a boon for the Goths in Italy, and under their leader Totila most of the Byzantine territorial gains were reversed. Rome and Naples were captured and the empire's armies endured a number of humiliating defeats: at the battle of Faenza in 542, troops simply laid down their weapons and fled the scene. The whirligig had not quite ceased to spin, however, and in the early 350s the Byzantines once more came out on top. By 554, thanks to the efforts of the new military mastermind Narses, Byzantine control of Italy was established. It had been a chaotic story, best epitomised by the fortunes of the city of Rome: in Gothic hands in 546, taken back by the Byzantines in 547, a Gothic stronghold again in 549 and finally an imperial possession in 552. These, to say the least, were interesting years for those unfortunate enough to live by the Tiber.

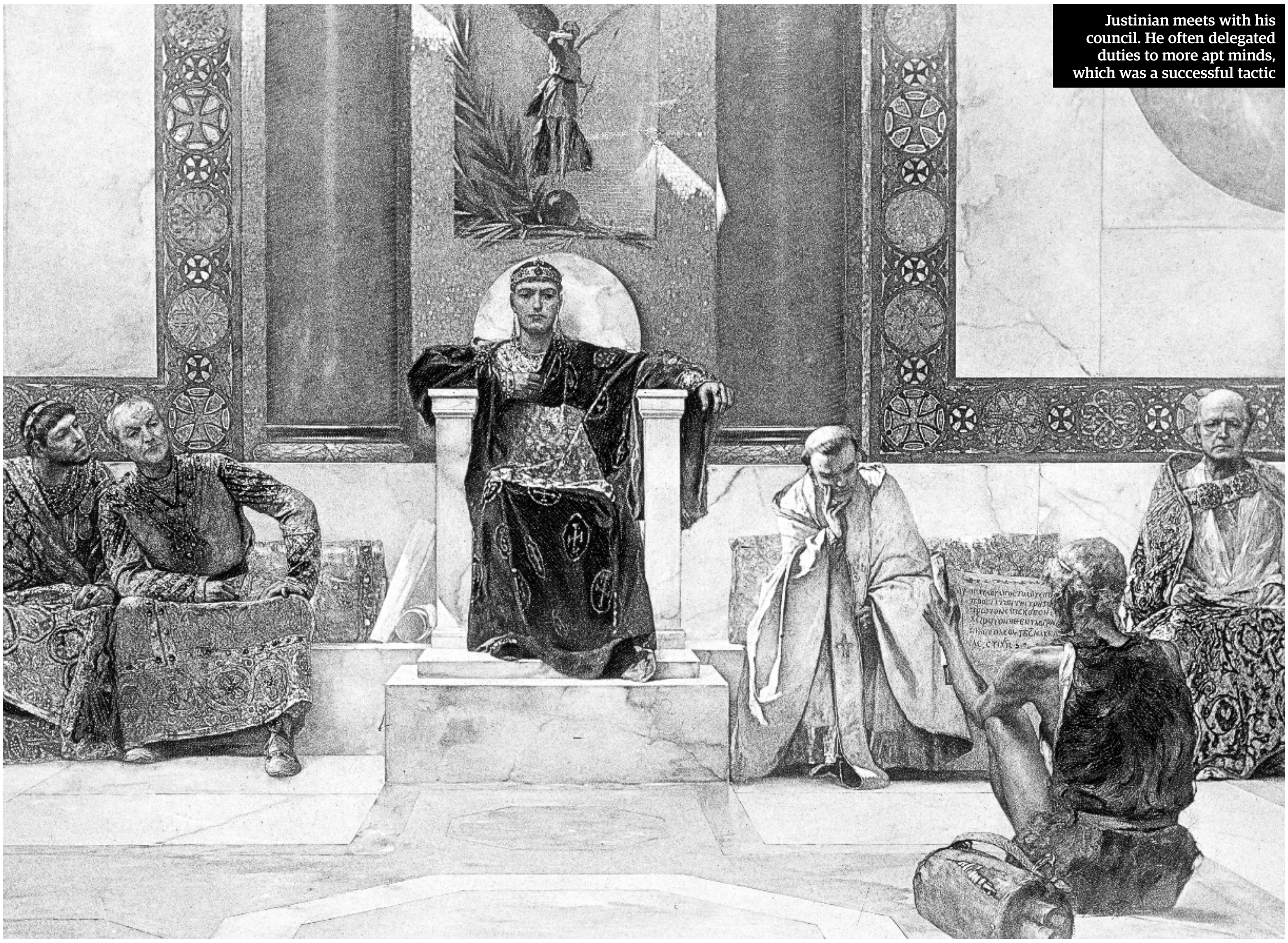
The burning issue is whether all these exertions had served any useful purpose. The roster of victories was impressive - gains were also made in southern Spain - but did they truly represent a resurgence of the old Western Empire? Procopius insisted that "no greater or mightier deeds are to be found in history than those which occurred in these wars", but they had cost a great deal of money and stretched the empire's resources to their limits. Worse yet, the jewel in the crown of the Byzantines' western conquests was only on display for a short while. Within a few years of Justinian's death, Italy had fallen to the invading Lombards. Many have accused Justinian of over-reaching, of hubris, and while a little unfair, the familiar charge against the emperor has some validity: that he never fought a war that was necessary and could always be counted on to send troops to a war that could have been avoided.

Keeping the home fires burning

Justinian's domestic policies have also divided opinion. The emperor was very much a details man, and many of his reforms were eminently sensible, even if they stirred up political resentment. Attempts to improve the operation of provincial government were long overdue, but this involved reducing the influence of local bigwigs, much to their dismay. Similarly, promoting talented men in the imperial administration was a seemingly obvious idea, but those among the aristocracy who had always expected to secure the highest offices of state were hardly going to be delighted by such a development.

> Pomp and prestige were all the rage, but few were quite as addicted to the trappings and displays of power as Justinian

There was also the issue of Justinian's style of governance. Pomp and prestige were all the rage across the ancient world, but few were quite as addicted to the trappings and displays of power as Justinian. An absolutist by temperament, he held to a political vision in which his word was law and in which any attempts to diminish his prestige could not be tolerated. This even extended to the matter of clothing. As one decree explained, no one except the emperor "shall be allowed to decorate the bridles and saddles of his horses or his own belts with pearls, emeralds or hyacinths". If this rubric was ignored the culprit was to be fined 1,000 pounds of gold and, worse yet, put to death. Similar rules applied to the wearing of the imperial purple. Justinian even took it upon himself to dictate the rules and regulations of Christian doctrine. In this era fierce debates were raging about the fundamentals of belief, with some stressing Christ's humanity, others focusing on his divinity and a



Justinian meets with his council. He often delegated duties to more apt minds, which was a successful tactic

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majority attempting to square the two. Justinian worked very hard to plough a middle course, calling a Church Council in 553. Unfortunately providing a forum for debate only served to deepen animosities. Throughout his reign Justinian was unflinchingly hostile to any variety of religious dissent, with pagans and heretics alike paying the price. He had, perhaps, little choice, but all too often his tactics were clumsy.

Justinian was always in a precarious position. So long as the military victories kept coming he was relatively secure, but when prices rose, disease struck or some section of society became disgruntled, the political landscape could become extremely treacherous. An early example of this can be located in the horrendous Nika riots of 532. Incidents involving members of Constantinople's chariot-racing fans provided the catalyst, but at a deeper level the protests represented popular agitation against the arbitrary nature of Justinian's rule. What's more, the emperor's aristocratic enemies were more than happy to fan the flames of discord. Justinian was forced to dismiss some of his leading advisers and, at one point, came very

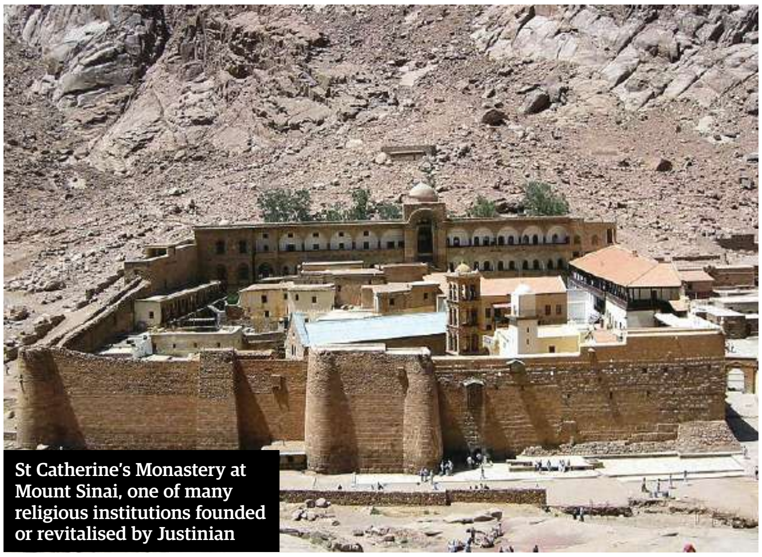
Laying down the law

Reforming the empire's legal rules and regulations was Justinian's most lasting achievement

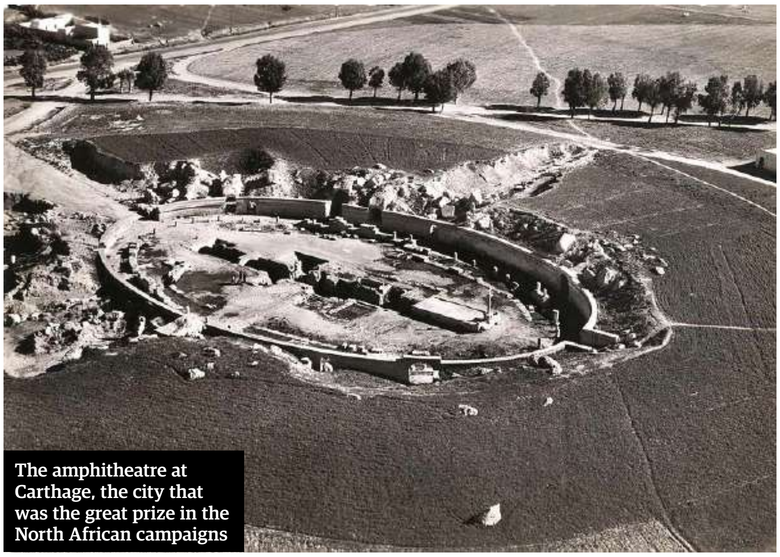
Any empire worth its salt benefited from a coherent legal code. Oddly enough, Rome had never scored highly in this regard. Attempts had been made – all the way back to the Twelve Tables of the fifth century BCE – to improve matters, but by the time of Justinian the empire's laws were still in something of a muddle. As Justinian's territories expanded, the need for reform grew increasingly urgent. It was time to codify, to standardise and to allow for a little legal innovation rather than simply assembling highly selective dossiers of ancient laws. Moreover, it was high time that all the empire's citizens were subject to the same standards of justice: getting away with wrongdoing simply because you were higher up the social ladder seemed rather arbitrary. Thus the series of reforms, the Corpus Iuris Civilis, often referred to as the Justinian Code, came into being.

This actually covers three separate projects of the mid-530s: the Digest, an encyclopaedic collection of writings by Roman jurists; the Code, which provided detailed explanations of laws; and the Institutes, a summary of the law which was also used as a primer by law students. A range of legal issues were covered in these texts – from slavery to marriage, from land-ownership to the affairs of the Church. The Code would enjoy an extraordinary journey through the centuries, forming the basis of the legal systems of countries across Europe and beyond. It was, perhaps, Justinian's greatest achievement, though the painstaking work was carried out by an estimable team of legal experts. When Justinian's admirer Agapetus described the emperor as being "clothed in the purple of justice" he had compelling evidence to back up the claim.

Fragments of Justinian's hugely influential legal code



St Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai, one of many religious institutions founded or revitalised by Justinian



The amphitheatre at Carthage, the city that was the great prize in the North African campaigns

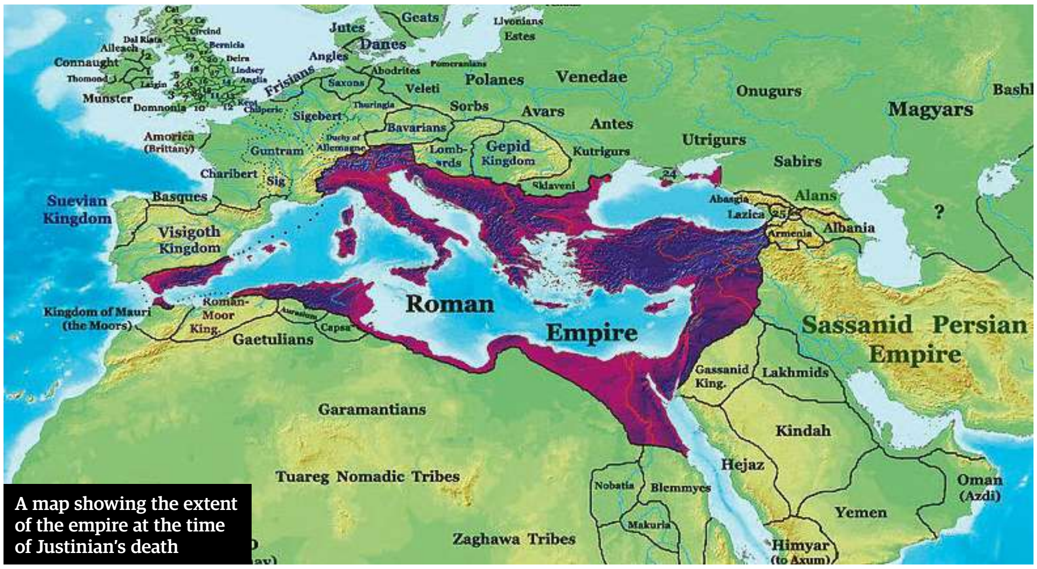
A taxing time

Attempting to revive the glory of Rome was one thing: paying for it was quite another.

Three factors have a tendency to deplete imperial coffers: fighting costly wars, losing large swathes of tax-paying citizens to epidemic diseases and an addiction to tax-evasion among the citizenry. Justinian confronted all three challenges. Attempts were made to reform the system of tax collection by returning the job to local councils rather than trusting the so-called vindices – or "destructive hirelings" as Justinian referred to them. This plan met with limited success. Efforts were also made to impose new levels of taxation on those in the higher echelons of society. This plan provoked a great deal of animosity.

Adding to his woes, Justinian faced opposition from those further down the social pecking order. The Nika riots of 532 were provoked, at least in part, by the emperor's aggressive taxation policies. The plagues of the 540s only made the situation worse: Justinian insisted that tax income should remain constant, even though perhaps a third of the empire's population had perished. Small wonder that the tax collector was one of the most unpopular figures in Byzantine lands. Even Justinian admitted as much: "It would not be just for a man who has been bred up in severe exactions and the sins that these involve" to "straightaway be ordained a priest and preach about loving kindness".

A coin from the reign of Justinian



Connaught
Munster
Dal Riata
Jutes
Danes
Angles
Saxons
Frisians
Geats
Livonians
Estes
Abodrites
Polanes
Veleti
Venedae
Sorbs
Avars
Antes
Onugurs
Magyars
Bashl
Domnonia
Amorica (Brittany)
Sigebert
Thuringia
Bavarians
Guntram
Lombards
Gepid Kingdom
Kutrigurs
Utrigurs
Sabirs
Charibert
Sig
Sklaveni
Suevian Kingdom
Basques
Visigoth Kingdom
Abasgia
Lazica
Alans
Armenia
Albania
?
Kingdom of Mauri (the Moors)
Roman-Moor King.
Gaetulians
Capsa
Roman
Empire
Sassanid Persian Empire
Gassanid King.
Lakhmids
Garamantians
Kindah
Hejaz
Tuareg Nomadic Tribes
Nobatia
Blemmyes
Makuria
Oman (Azdi)
Yemen
Himyar (to Axum)
Zaghawa Tribes

A map showing the extent of the empire at the time of Justinian's death

close to fleeing the city: alternative emperors were waiting in the wings. The riots were eventually subdued in brutal fashion – thousands of people were herded into the Hippodrome and slaughtered – but the city had suffered terribly. Many buildings had been razed or burned and, as Procopius put it, Constantinople was a "charred mass of ruins". It is tempting to think that the western military adventures over the coming years were, at least in part, Justinian's way of winning back the admiration of his people.

We should not, of course, imagine that Justinian simply stumbled from crisis to crisis. His legal reforms were one of the era's greatest achievements, and he scored a huge economic victory by having Indian monks smuggle silkworms into the empire: a new, lucrative industry was born, and dependence on costly Persian silk came to an end. Even disaster could be turned to advantage. The Nika riots destroyed as much as a third of Constantinople, but this allowed for a host of ambitious building projects, not least the rebuilding of the church of Hagia Sophia. The edifice that emerged was, by any standard, an architectural wonder – a place of vast domes, marble and mosaics. According to Procopius it was "distinguished by indescribable beauty, excelling both in size and in the harmony of its measures". At least 30 other churches were erected in Constantinople – a city that Justinian transformed into a cultural and artistic haven – with countless other buildings popping up across the rest of the empire.

All told, it is impossible to gainsay Justinian's ambition and dynamism. During his reign the empire's borders stretched as far as they ever would. He was not granted the gifts of military prowess, but he knew how to pick a general. He was not a matinee idol, but he scrubbed up rather

At least 30 other churches were erected in Constantinople – a city Justinian transformed into a cultural and artistic haven

The Hagia Sophia in Constantinople - the pinnacle of Justinian's architectural achievements

© Getty Images

> "The Nika riots destroyed as much as a third of Constantinople, but this allowed for a host of ambitious building projects"

well. As one contemporary explained: "He was short with a good chest, a good nose, fair-skinned, curly haired, round faced, handsome with receding hair, a florid complexion, with his hair and beard greying." It is telling, however, that by the later parts of the reign even some of Justinian's greatest supporters had become critics. Procopius, once the emperor's most ardent fan, felt obliged to swap the panegyrics for exercises in character assassination. Justinian was "very complacent and resembled most the silly ass which follows, only shaking its ears, when one drags it by the bridle". The emperor was impossible to predict. He "was at once villainous and amenable… He was never truthful with anyone, but always guileful in what he said and did, yet easily hoodwinked by any who wanted to deceive him." Even the lauded reforms had, for Procopius, become suspect: "Existing offices he abolished, and invented new ones for the management of public affairs. He did the same thing to the laws and to the regulations of the army, and his reason was not any improvement of justice or any advantage, but simply that everything might be new and named after himself."

It has been suggested that these words were intended as satire, not full-throated condemnation, but they do a good job of summing up the tangled reputation of a Byzantine ruler who, depending upon who you ask, kept the flame of the western empire alight or ensured that it would be snuffed out forever. In any event it is worth noting that Edward Gibbon, in his famous *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, was able to find a few kind words to write about Justinian - and Gibbon was usually outrageously censorious in his adjudications. For all the avarice and political miscalculations, Gibbon was willing to admit that Justinian could not be held entirely responsible for the subsequent decline in the empire's fortunes. Yes, the victories in the west would soon count for little, but perhaps this was just because "the age was unfortunate". For all the purple silk, and no matter how many artists, writers and scholars you could lure to your court, life as Byzantine emperor in the fourth century was never going to be easy - always trapped in the shadow of a mighty civilisation that never had much hope of returning. Justinian, at whatever cost, laid much of the groundwork for another civilisation that, every once in a while, would rival Rome in its cultural allure, dynamism and pomposity.

THE EMPRESS FROM THE BROTHEL THEODORA

As a courtesan who had become queen, Theodora was both loved and reviled. Who was the woman behind one of Byzantium's greatest emperors?

Written by Willow Winsham

Young Theodora made quite a name for herself with her provocative dress, and habit of stripping on stage

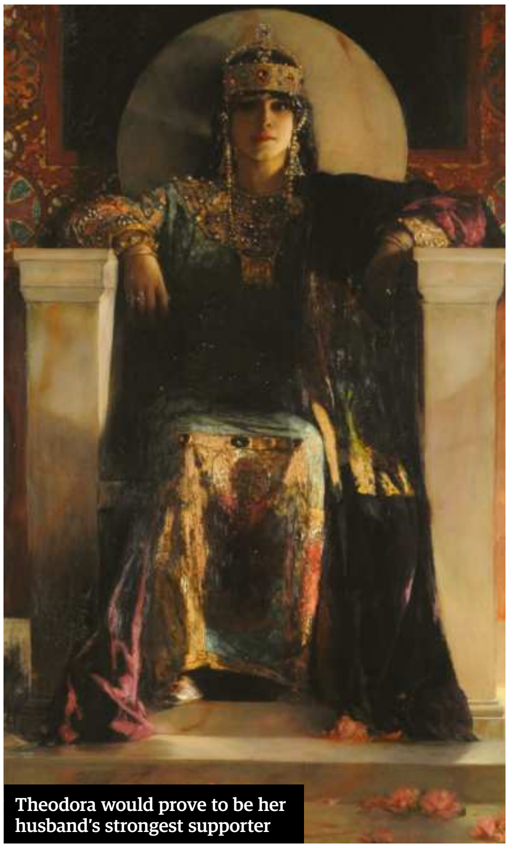
Born to a bear trainer and an actress in Constantinople, the woman fated to become the wife of a Byzantine emperor hardly had an auspicious start in life.

In Theodora's early years her life took a path that her later detractors would revel in, providing effortless fuel for the gossip that would surround her even after death. For there is little doubt that Theodora had two intertwined and equally suspect occupations before her marriage: she was well known both as an actress and as a courtesan. This line of work was also taken by at least one of her two sisters, and it is said that her mother ushered the girls into their professions after the death of their father, Acacius.

John of Ephesus, a writer sympathetic towards Theodora, refers to her as having come "from the brothel", while the less friendly Procopius, whose writings are our largest single source of information on Theodora, also repeats this detail. From Procopius, we learn that the young Theodora made quite a name for herself: with her provocative dress and habit of stripping on stage, she titillated her audiences, even allowing buckets of grain to be emptied between her legs for geese to peck out. When the performances were over, Theodora went further still and offered herself to all, both high and low, attending banquets to drum up custom.

However true or not the worst exaggerations of Procopius were, this was not a life that would do for one such as Theodora. Early on it became apparent that she was intelligent, resourceful and able to think for herself, traits that would serve her well. At 16, Theodora left Constantinople for North Africa, where she spent four years in the role as mistress to Hecebolius, a Syrian official. The whole matter ended in tears, but this did not bring her down; on her slow return to Constantinople via Alexandria and Antioch, Theodora met patriarchs and others of influence, learning and honing the skills and manners that she displayed to such great effect as empress. It was during this time that she is said to have converted to the controversial Monophysite religion, which held the belief that the human and divine natures of Christ were fused into one.

Setting her former occupations behind her, in 522, in her early 20s, Theodora returned to Constantinople. She set herself up as a wool spinner, making her home close to the palace. Here she caught the eye of Justinian – heir and nephew to Emperor Justin I. The middle-aged Justinian was captivated by her, and was determined to marry Theodora: but there was one, apparently insurmountable, obstacle. An old law stated that government officials were prohibited from marrying actresses, and although Theodora had renounced her previous role, her dalliance with the stage now barred her from becoming the wife of the man who was heir to the empire. To further compound the problem, Euphamia, empress to Justin I, was a firm upholder of this law, and, due to religious and personal differences, was further ill-disposed towards Theodora in particular. It seemed as if the couple were to be thwarted, but luck was on their side. Euphamia died c.524, and it became clear then that resistance to the match had


Theodora would prove to be her husband's strongest supporter

© Wiki

Theodora's story inspired Winston Churchill's mother to dress up as the Byzantine empress at a costumed ball

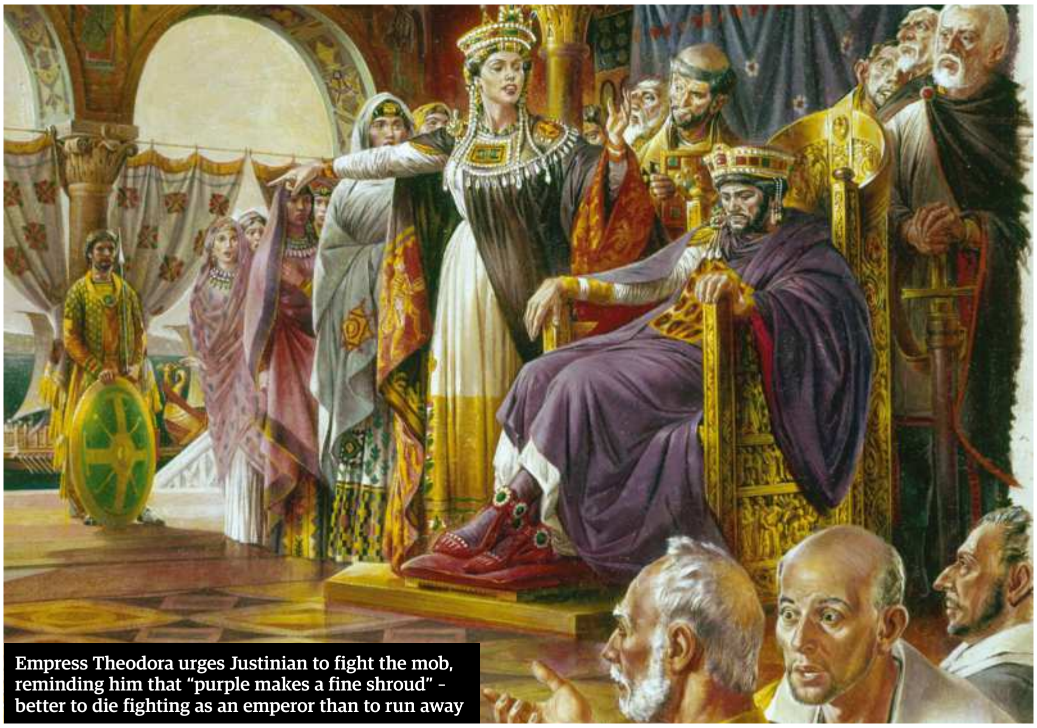
been decidedly one-sided. Free now to act without causing himself marital strife and also under pressure from his heir, Justin repealed the law that stood in the way of the happy couple and they married soon after, uncaring of the scandal that followed in its wake.

In 527, Justinian came into his role of emperor, and Theodora found herself empress of Byzantium. If ashamed of her past in any way, Theodora made no effort to hide it; friends from her old life were made welcome at the palace, and her illegitimate daughter - whether Justinian's or from a previous relationship is unclear - was free to join her mother. Justinian likewise does not seem to have been troubled by his wife's past, perhaps in part due to his own less-than-illustrious beginnings. Despite or perhaps because of her humble start in life, Theodora was a stickler for ceremony and show in her role of empress. As on the stage, looks and appearances were everything, and she would not let anyone - high or low - forget for one moment that she was empress. Images of Theodora show a well-dressed woman, resplendent in gold and purple robes and glittering jewellery, the crown that marked her power and high position visible for all to see. Theodora also made sure she was given due honour and acknowledgement by visiting officials and members of the imperial household, often, it was alleged, making important dignitaries wait for hours at a time before receiving them.

Theodora was not content to be a trophy wife, and there are clear indications that she sought to better herself. She was an avid reader, choosing to read herself rather than be read to, and was actively involved in the governance of the empire. She saw that those she favoured were promoted and received positions, while actively working to remove those who did not support her or looked down on her. The empress did not suffer fools, and, according to Theodora's detractors at least, did not hesitate to remove those who displeased her. It was not unusual for a Byzantine empress to have influence both in court and even political matters, bestowing patronage and holding sway with her husband. Likewise, communicating with foreign envoys and visiting dignitaries was well within the remit of the role. With Theodora, however, came the first time that an empress went further; not only did she fill the conventionally accepted place of consort, but, according to some accounts, she was empress regnant in her own right in all but name. It is hardly surprising that there would be hostility towards the upstart empress, and there were those who grumbled, both behind closed doors and publicly, about the brazen woman from such humble beginnings. Indeed, Theodora's seeming flaunting of her past and refusal to disown her background would have been seen as a challenge to the established order.

> Looks and appearances were everything, and she would not let anyone - high or low - forget that she was empress

Unsurprisingly then, when Justinian embarked upon a series of reforms within the city, Theodora was not idle. The rights of women were something that particularly concerned Theodora. In 528, women of all classes were protected by a law that ordered the death penalty for kidnap or rape, whereas before lower class women and slaves were


Empress Theodora urges Justinian to fight the mob, reminding him that "purple makes a fine shroud" - better to die fighting as an emperor than to run away

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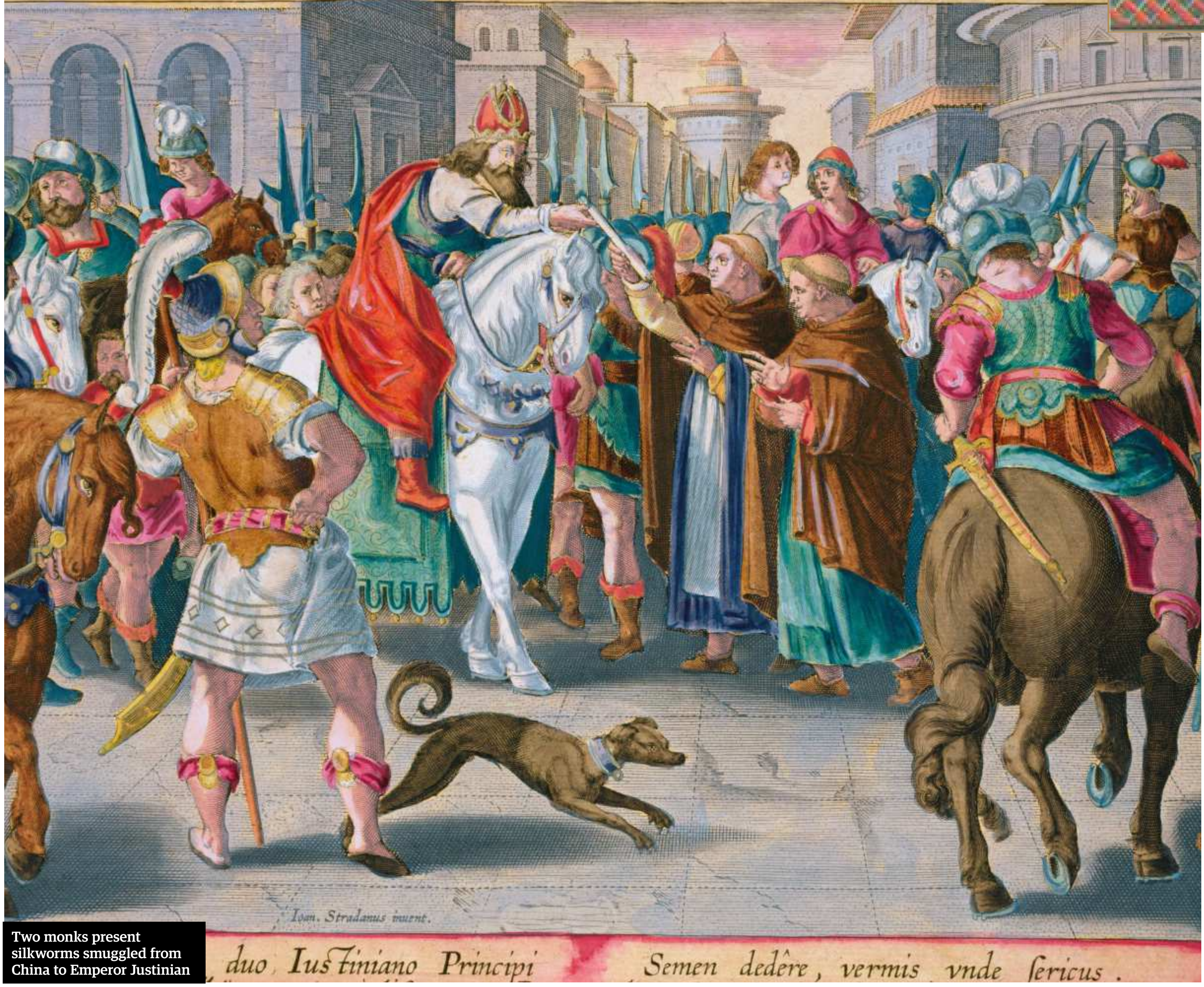
Ioan. Stradanus inuent.
duo Iuſtiniano Principi
Semen dedêre, vermis vnde ſericus.

Two monks present silkworms smuggled from China to Emperor Justinian

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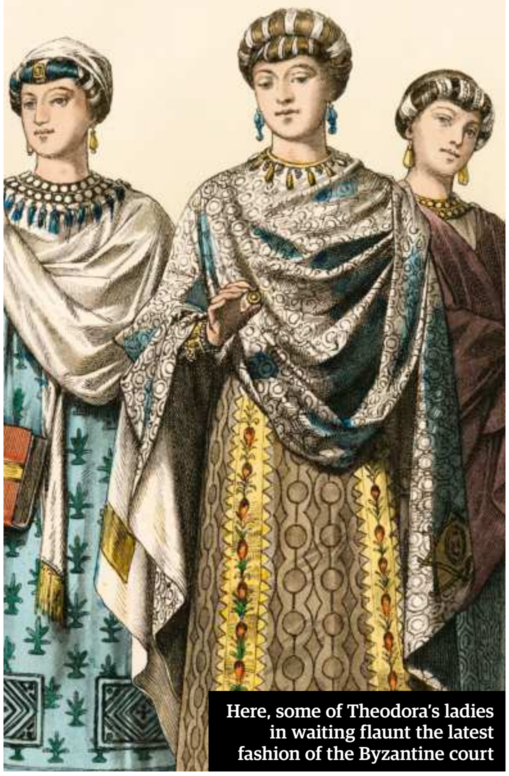
> "Theodora was instrumental in attempts to reform the corruption in Constantinople's brothels. Prostitution was a major issue"

exempt, at the mercy of anyone. In 534-535, laws on prostitution were also tightened, and it became illegal to force or coerce anyone into the profession. Likewise, women were granted more rights in cases of divorce and also where property was concerned through her direct involvement, and killing a wife who had committed adultery was also prohibited.

In all of this, Theodora had the backing of the emperor, who listened to and respected her views. In particular, Theodora was instrumental in attempts to reform the corruption in Constantinople's brothels. Prostitution was a major issue within the city, and exploitation and mistreatment were rife. With her husband's backing, Theodora set out to address this, setting up a convent as an escape for the women caught in this abusive life. Sources differ, however, and two distinct versions of events can be read. In one telling, the women were rescued from the horrors of the streets, living in comfort and harmony in their reformed lives behind the convent walls. Procopius, however, paints a more sinister picture: in his version, the women were kidnapped, moved into the convent against their will and forcibly reformed. The empress, far from being their saviour, was in fact jailer and tormentor; the women did not want to be removed from the life they knew, and some even committed suicide by throwing themselves onto the rocks below the convent in utter despair at their 'rescue'.

Not mentioned by contemporary sources, it is likely that the worst excesses recounted by



Here, some of Theodora's ladies in waiting flaunt the latest fashion of the Byzantine court

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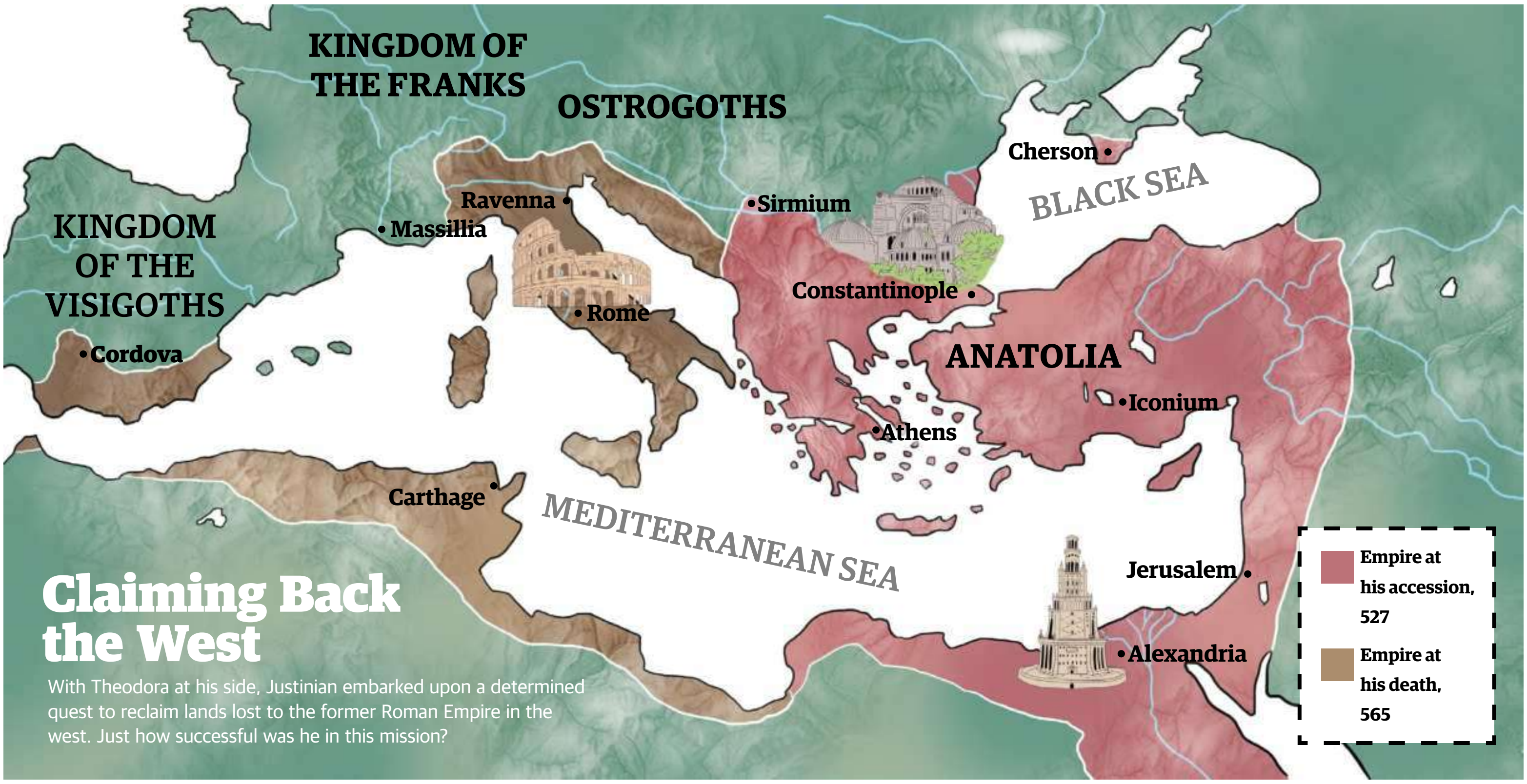
Procopius were part of the embittered smear campaign later carried out against Theodora and Justinian. Whether truthful or not, however, there are hints at a darker side to Theodora's story, at the lengths the proud and self-righteous empress would go to achieve her aims. There are tales of forced marriages at Theodora's behest, and the vindictive hounding of officials who displeased her from office. Although not proven, there were also rumours Theodora was involved in the murder of Amalasuintha of the Goths, a potential rival for Justinian's hand.

It is Theodora's reported influence during the events of the infamous Nika revolt, however, that are the most cited example of her power and influence both in political matters and with her husband. In January 532, the Hippodrome in Constantinople, the venue of the popular chariot races, was the scene of the biggest challenge to Justinian's reign. The sweeping reforms and expansive building programme instigated by the emperor throughout the city were met with protest at the disruption they caused, and this discontent erupted as the pressures took their toll on an already strained population. Riots broke out, and although they were put down and the ringleaders rounded up, two escaped, with mercy demanded for the fugitives at the next races. When this was denied by Justinian, violence surged afresh, and with the additional involvement of members of the aristocracy, it became not just an occasion of popular unrest, but a political coup with the intention of removing the emperor for good.

A rival candidate, a nobleman with imperial blood named Hypatius, was proposed and enthroned, the violence in the Hippodrome escalating and forcing Justinian and his advisers back into the palace. The emperor was prepared to flee, when the former actress stepped forward to perform perhaps the most important role of her life. It was not, Theodora told her husband, time to run away - an emperor should never be in the position of fugitive, and it was better to die an emperor in the role allotted to him than to be safe in hiding. Shamed, scolded or given much-needed fight, Justinian stood firm. Sending his troops to the Hippodrome, the revolt was decisively crushed, with between 30,000 and 35,000 rebels left dead. The pretender Hypatius was executed, as were others closely involved, and Justinian emerged the victor: his position unassailable and his wife vindicated and triumphant.

> Theodora told her husband it was not time to run away… it was better to die an emperor than to be safe in hiding

After Nika, it was clear that Justinian and his empress were there to stay, and never again was there such a serious challenge to his title. Theodora had been instrumental in this display of power, and is generally considered to



Claiming Back the West

With Theodora at his side, Justinian embarked upon a determined quest to reclaim lands lost to the former Roman Empire in the west. Just how successful was he in this mission?

Timeline

533

North Africa
Justinian's troops win a decisive victory, reclaiming the North African territories that had been conquered by the Vandals, marking the beginning of two decades of conquest.
533

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Sicily
General Belisarius invades with a force of 7,500 men and, meeting little resistance, conquers Sicily, gaining a gateway through into Italy and beyond.
535

Rome
Rome is captured in December, only to be besieged by Vitigis, the king of the Ostrogoths, from February 537 until March 538. Justinian's troops emerge triumphant.
536

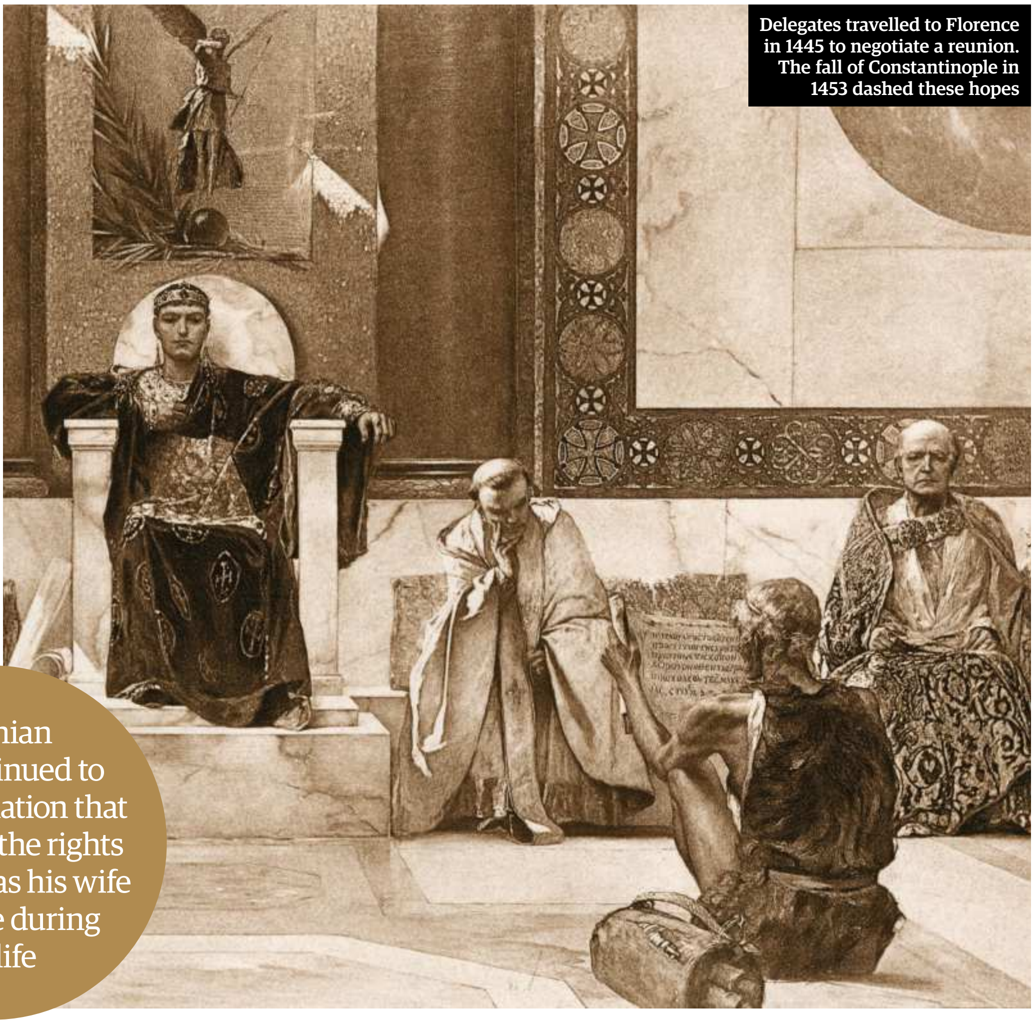
Milan
The city is claimed by Mundilas, but this victory is short lived; despite relief being sent, Milan is recaptured and burned by the vengeful might of the Gothic army.
538

have saved the day. It was not the only time she was said to have saved Justinian's throne: when in the early 540s Justinian lay seriously ill with plague, it was Theodora who effectively took over the reins of state, holding them steady until her husband recovered.

Based on mutual respect and affection as it was, the nature of Theodora's relationship with Justinian meant that they were able to present a united front, even when they differed in opinion. One area where this was abundantly clear was in matters of religion. Theodora had converted to the controversial Monophysite brand of Christianity at an early age, while the emperor was firm in his Chalcedonian beliefs. The fact they were able to maintain their differences while keeping their respect for each other and working together as a united force showed a lot. Here again Theodora's influence can be seen; she not only founded a Monophysite monastery, but she also offered protection in the palace itself for those who were in danger for their beliefs, sheltering Monophysite bishops and leaders. One in particular, Anthimus, the patriarch of Constantinople, she sheltered for 12 years in her own chambers. Theodora is also said to have outfoxed her own husband when it came to the conversion of the people of Nobatae in southern Egypt; Justinian had earmarked them for the Chalcedonian faith, but through her wiles, Theodora caused his missionaries to be delayed, her own Monophysite men arriving first and winning the people to the Monophysite cause.

Theodora died in Constantinople on 28 June 548. Her influence continued even after her death, however, through the respect and honour Justinian showed to her name, the emperor's grief at her funeral declared to be most genuine by those who observed it. Not only did he maintain the promise made to his wife to protect the Monophysite community she had established, Justinian also continued to enact legislation that dealt with the rights of women as his wife had done during her life, ensuring that Theodora's legacy to the city that had known most of her life was to live long after her. Charismatic, bold and unforgettable, Theodora remains one of the most fascinating and influential empresses the Byzantine Empire had ever known.

Justinian also continued to enact legislation that dealt with the rights of women, as his wife had done during her life



Delegates travelled to Florence in 1445 to negotiate a reunion. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 dashed these hopes

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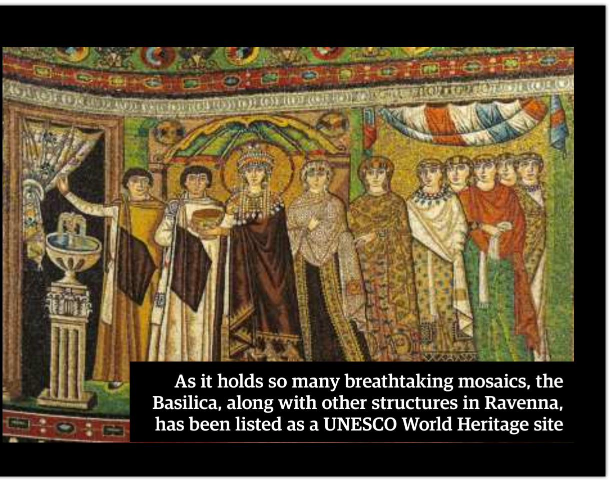
Ceiling of the Basilica of San Vitale

One of the wonders of Ravenna, Italy, the Basilica holds a unique position in the history of art and architecture. Begun in 526 and completed 21 years later, this marvel of Roman and Byzantine styles is the only structure of its kind to survive from Justinian I's reign, and holds the biggest collection of Byzantine mosaics outside of Constantinople.



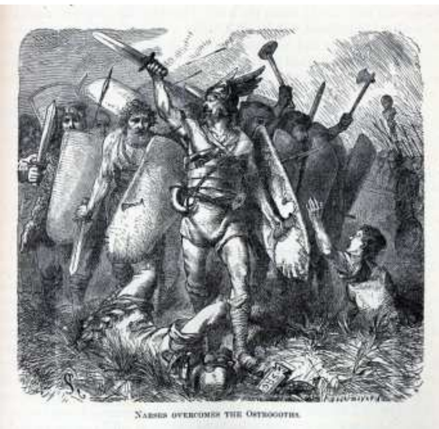
As it holds so many breathtaking mosaics, the Basilica, along with other structures in Ravenna, has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site

© Wiki

Ravenna
The one-time capital of the Western Roman Empire and current capital of the Ostrogoths is reached by Belisarius and taken for the empire in May of this year.
540

Italy
Troubles abound for Justinian's forces during the next decade as he loses ground in Italy due to fighting in the east. Much of what had already been gained is lost.
541

Iberian Peninsula
With an army 2,000 strong, the empire's forces take several south-eastern cities; the new province of Spania will be founded in the aftermath.
552



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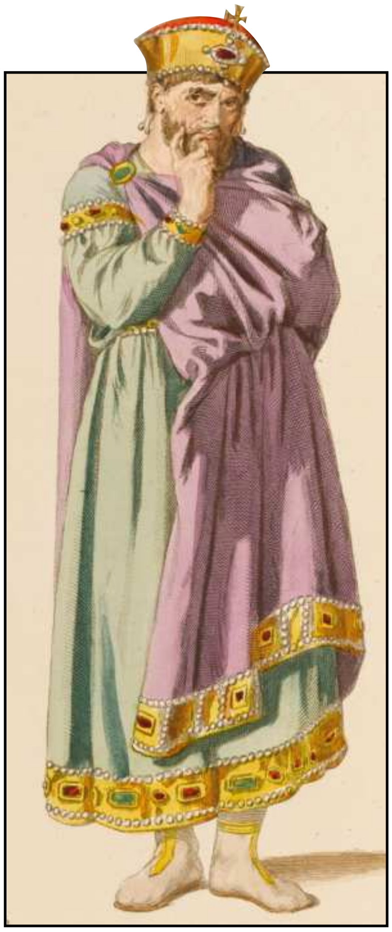
554

Italy
Under Narses, the empire's forces finally prove triumphant against an enemy force of 30,000 and, after protracted fighting, Italy is decisively reclaimed for the empire.
554

MURDEROUS RULERS

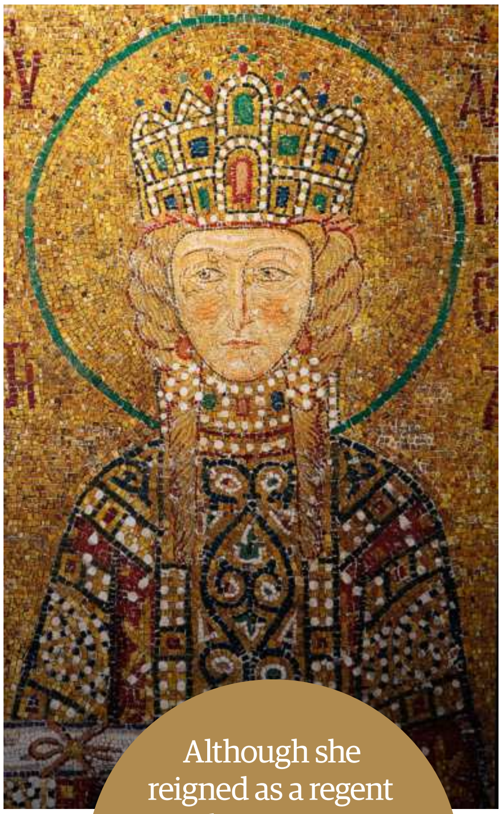
At the heart of the Byzantine Empire was a monarchy that survived on intrigue, deception and bloodthirsty violence



PHOCAS

NON-DYNASTIC C.547-610

Phocas was a member of the army during the reign of Emperor Maurice. A bloody military revolt against Maurice led to his execution and as a vocal opponent of the emperor, Phocas was crowned as the new ruler. Civil war ensued and aristocratic landowners were angered as Phocas stripped them of their power and influence. There were revolts all over the empire as factions sprung up determined to remove the usurper. Constantinople was seized and Phocas was promptly beheaded.

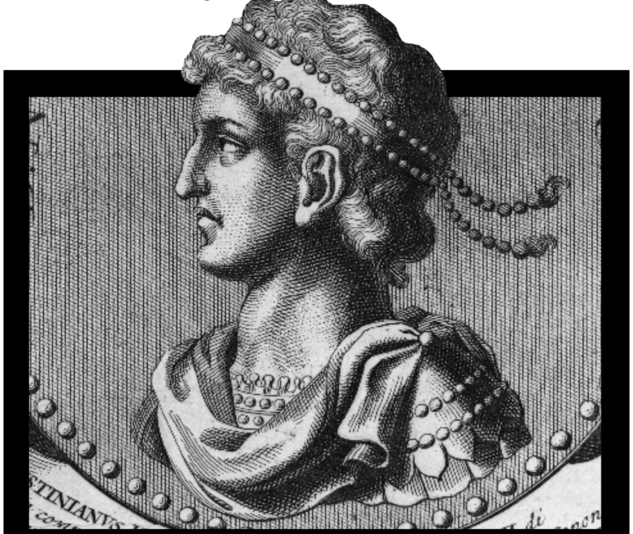


IRENE

ISAURIAN DYNASTY C.752-803

Irene was thrust into a power when she became regent for her son, Constantine VI, after her husband's sudden death in 780. She developed a taste for power and refused to relinquish control to her son for many years, who finally declared himself emperor in 790. Popular support allowed Irene to become Constantine's co-ruler in 792 and by 797 she had successfully deposed him. Irene even had Constantine blinded to prevent him from returning to power. However, Irene's desire to rule alone and refusal to remarry ultimately led to her downfall and deposition in 802. She died impoverished one year later.

> Although she reigned as a regent and co-emperor beforehand, Irene was the first female to rule the Byzantine Empire entirely by herself



JUSTINIAN II

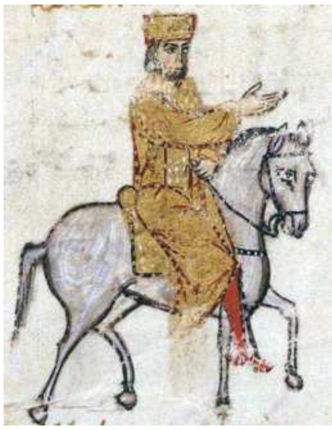
HERACLIAN DYNASTY C.668-711

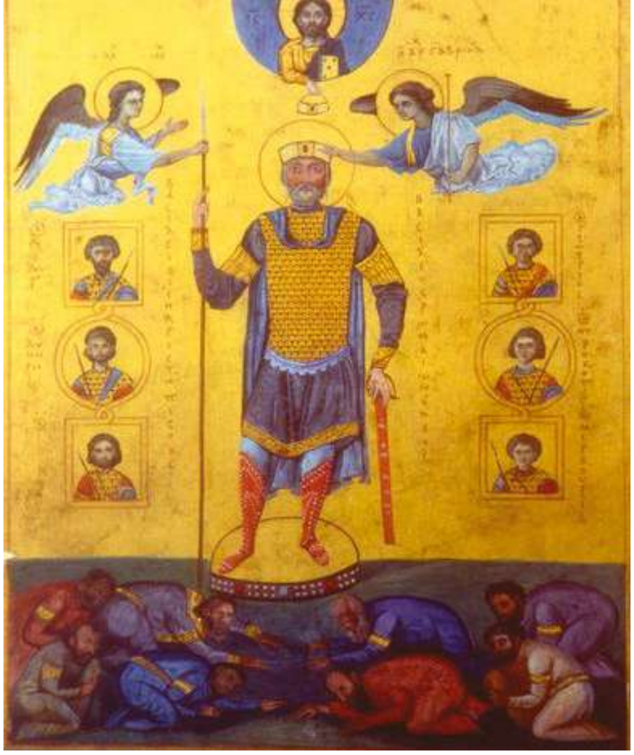
Justinian's reign was chaotic to say the least. After years of heavy taxation and conflict with the Church, he was deposed in 695. Justinian was mutilated in an attempt to stop him from regaining the throne, by having his nose cut off. This led to his moniker, 'rhinotmetos' ('slit-nosed'), and he supposedly wore a gold prosthetic. The former emperor plotted his return while in exile, seeking the help of the Khazars, and he was restored to the throne in 705. Cruel and repressive, Justinian only ruled for six years before he was deposed again and executed outside Constantinople.

BASIL I

MACEDONIAN DYNASTY 811-86

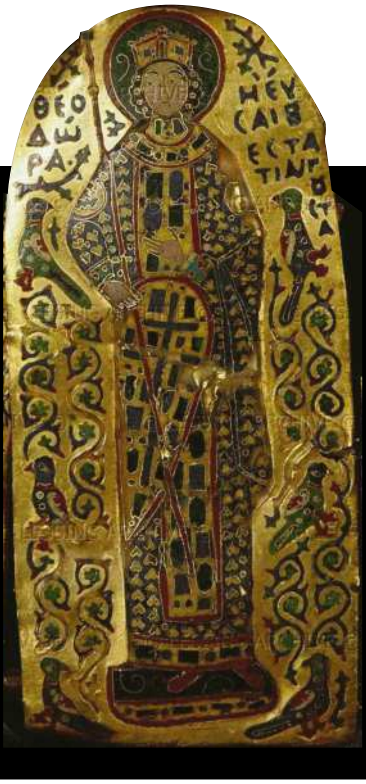
Though from humble origins, Basil earned the friendship and patronage of Emperor Michael III, who eventually crowned him co-emperor. Basil was a great manipulator and committed a series of murders to clear his path to the throne. When he sensed that Michael's favour for him was waning, he brutally murdered the emperor and his relatives. As ruler, he oversaw a series of conquests that turned the Byzantine Empire into the most dominant power in Europe.





BASIL II **MACEDONIAN DYNASTY 958-1025**

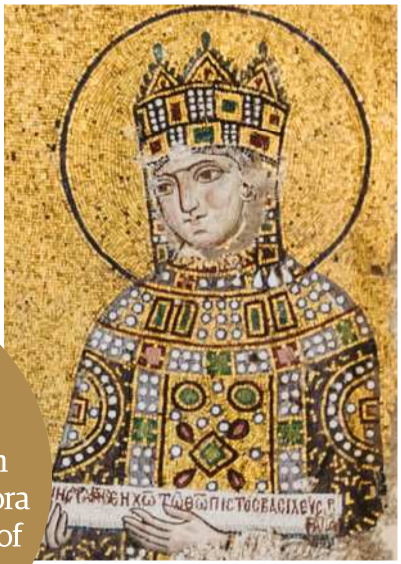
Basil the Bulgar-Slayer earned his name after conquering Bulgaria. Merciless and brutal, he blinded the 15,000 Bulgarian soldiers that he captured. In a macabre gesture, he left one eye for every hundred men, so they could lead the others home. Basil was popular with the army, which he joined on campaign instead of barking orders from the safety of his palace. Basil was a shrewd ruler, limiting the power of wealthy landowners after they dared to revolt against him. Despite numerous military campaigns, the economy flourished throughout his reign, and when he died the empire was left with a vast territory.



THEODORA PORPHYROGENITA

MACEDONIAN DYNASTY C.980-1056

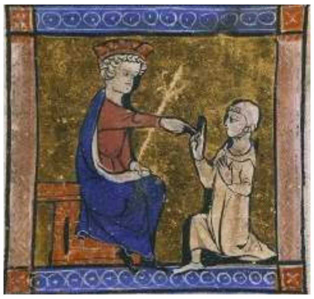
Empress Theodora was more suited to governing than her sister Zoë, which was proven when she had Michael V blinded to stop him reclaiming power. She lived with her sister's jealousy for years and was confined to a monastery during the Romanos' reign. When Zoë was restored to the throne, Theodora was reluctantly crowned beside her. After the deaths of Zoë and her husband, their co-ruler Constantine IX, Theodora ruled alone and the Macedonian dynasty ended with her.



ZOË PORPHYROGENITA

MACEDONIAN DYNASTY C.978-1050

As a daughter of Constantine VIII, Zoë was next in the Byzantine line of succession. She was known for having numerous love affairs and was rumoured to have killed her first husband, Romanos III, either by drowning or poisoning him. She married her lover, Michael, on the very same day but was then removed from political power until his death as he was afraid that she would turn on him. An uprising against his heir and nephew, Michael V, led to Zoë being restored to the throne alongside her sister Theodora, who promptly took control. A vain woman, Zoë had little interest in governing but resented Theodora for her authority and ability to rule.

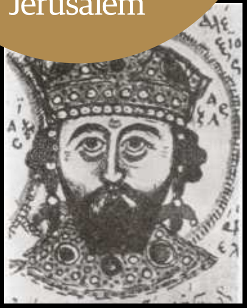


Andronicus was a womaniser and had numerous affairs, including with Manuel's niece Theodora Komnene, the widow of King Baldwin III of Jerusalem

ANDRONICUS I COMNENUS

KOMNENOI DYNASTY C.1118-85

Andronicus overthrew Empress Maria because of her unpopular favouritism towards Latins – she was the wife of his deceased cousin Manuel I and regent for her son Alexios II. Andronicus forced Alexios to sign his mother's death warrant and eventually had the boy killed. His accession sparked a widespread massacre of Latins within Constantinople, which he did nothing stop. Initially popular, Andronicus became tyrannical and the population revolted. He attempted to escape but was ultimately captured, tortured and killed.



ALEXIOS III

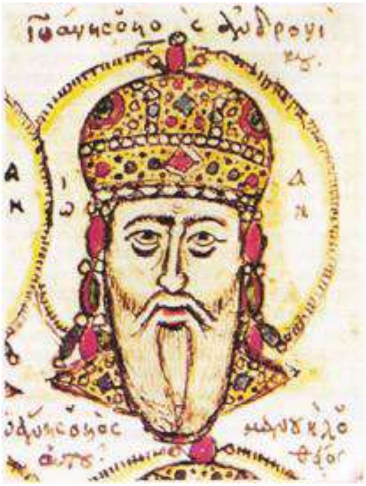
ANGELOS DYNASTY C.1153-1211

Alexios overthrew his younger brother Isaac II, who he blinded and imprisoned. A weak and extravagant man, Alexios spent money like water and depleted the treasury. His ability to govern was poor and he relied heavily on his capable wife, Euphrosyne. It all fell apart when Isaac's son and Alexios' nephew, the future Alexios IV, appealed to the Fourth Crusade for their help in restoring him to the throne. The empire was easy pickings for the Crusaders as Alexios' poor governance had left it in a complete state. Alexios fled abroad in the night and later died in a monastery.

JOHN V PALAEOLOGUS

PALAIOLOGOS DYNASTY 1332-91

Although not a murderous man, John's reign was dominated by violence and rebellion. Ascending to the throne as a young boy, the empire was plunged into a civil war over his regency. John managed to overthrow his regent, his father's old aide, a few years later following a second civil war. He was deposed twice – first by his son and then by his grandson. John managed to regain the throne both times but was forced to appease his sons with titles.



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IRENE OF ATHENS

The first woman to reign over the Romans alone, Irene ruled in spectacular fashion: part saint, part stone-cold schemer

Written by Hareth Al Bustani

In 768, a teenage girl called Irene arrived in Constantinople from Athens, accompanied by a fleet of warships loaded with silk. There, she was met by the city's leading men and women, who walked her down to the imperial palace. Days later, amidst much pomp, a crown was placed upon her head, and with that, she was married - to Emperor Constantine V's son, who would become Leo IV.

Born in 753, Irene may have been discovered through an eastern ritual called the bride show - introduced to the court by the emperor's wife, a Khazar princess. Officials scoured the empire for well-educated, exceptionally attractive women from reputable families, bringing them back to the capital and parading them past the groom, who simply picked his favourite. The adolescent Irene, though, was an odd choice. Since the reign of Leo's grandfather, Leo III, the Byzantines had pursued a policy of aggressive iconoclasm - suppressing religious imagery. Irene, in contrast, was a proud iconophile.

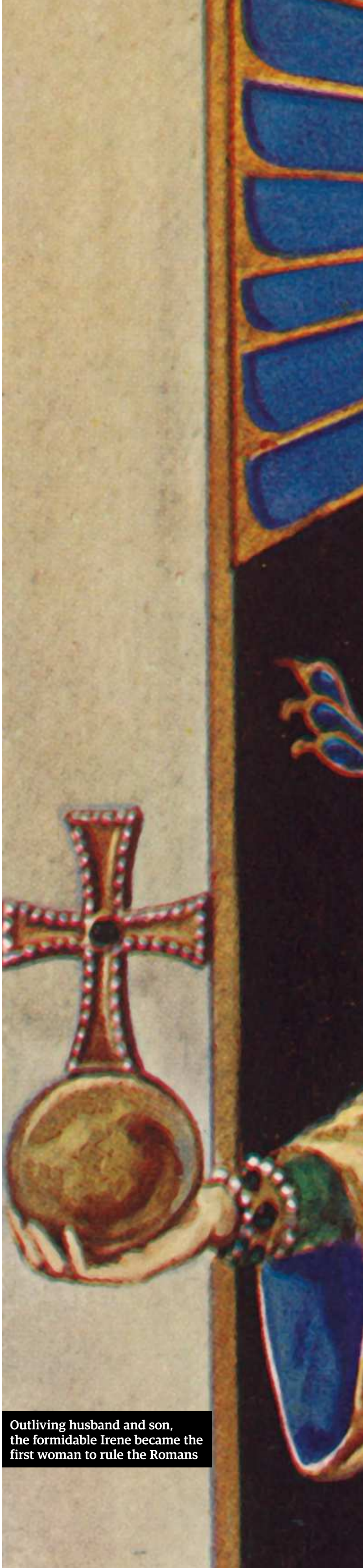
Ten years later, Constantine died during a campaign against the Bulgars. His iconophile opponents celebrated his demise, dubbing him the 'Dung Named'. To mitigate the power of his scheming brothers, the newly crowned Leo IV named his six-year-old son, Constantine, heir. From the outset, it appeared that Irene had a softening influence on her husband's iconoclast tendencies - as he ended the persecution of monks, and nominated a known iconophile, Paul of Cyprus, the patriarch in 780.

> Despite her often brutal tactics, including the fatal blinding of her son, Irene's icon worship saw her canonised as a saint

However, just two weeks later, when he caught his chief chamberlains smuggling in icons for Irene, he was enraged - having them whipped, paraded around the capital and forced into monkhood. One unlucky soul was flogged with such ferocity that he later died from his injuries. Hurt, the emperor viciously denounced his wife, and refused to live with her thereafter. He neglected, however, to remove her iconophile supporters from his household and, that summer, he suffered a suspiciously rapid outburst of boils on his head - dying of an excruciating fever soon after. Irene circulated a rumour that her husband had perished after donning a crown that Heraclius had donated to the treasury of Saint Sophia, tarnishing his memory.

Their son, the nine-year-old Constantine VI, was named emperor, with his mother ruling as empress regent until he came of age. It would be a trying time. The last empress regent, Martina, ended up with her tongue cut out, exiled alongside her son - whose nose was slit. As a woman, Irene would have enough trouble controlling the army, but as an iconophile, doubly so. Not even two months into the regency, her vast network of spies uncovered a scheme to replace her and her son with her brother-in-law, Nicephorus - who had already been stripped of his junior emperorship for conspiring against Leo. As a result, Nicephorus and his four brothers were forced into priesthood, rendering them ineligible for the crown.

Among the banished conspirators was the postal logothete - responsible for not only the postal service, but internal security and foreign diplomacy - who Irene replaced with her trusted eunuch,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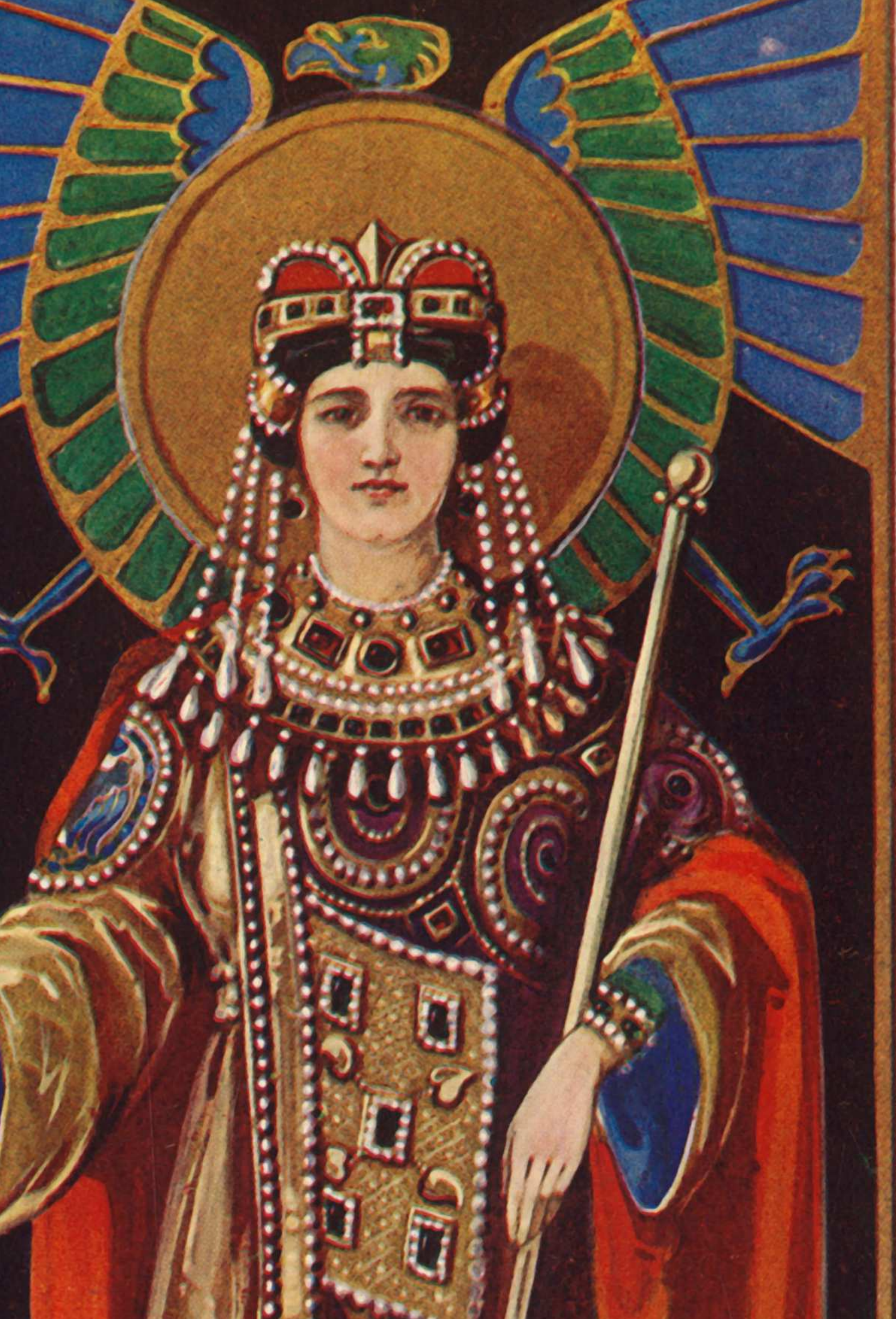
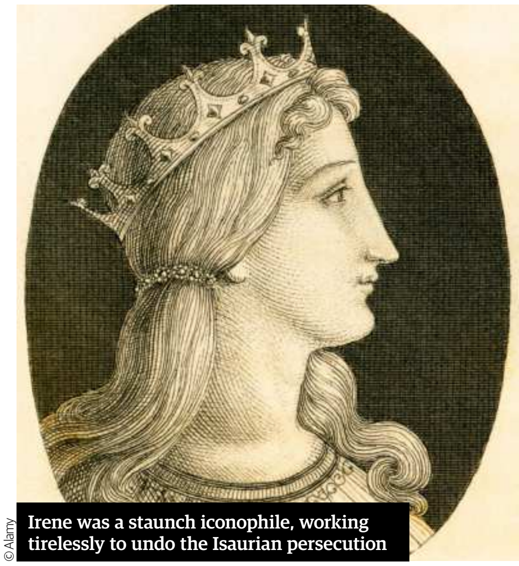
Outliving husband and son, the formidable Irene became the first woman to rule the Romans





Irene was a staunch iconophile, working tirelessly to undo the Isaurian persecution

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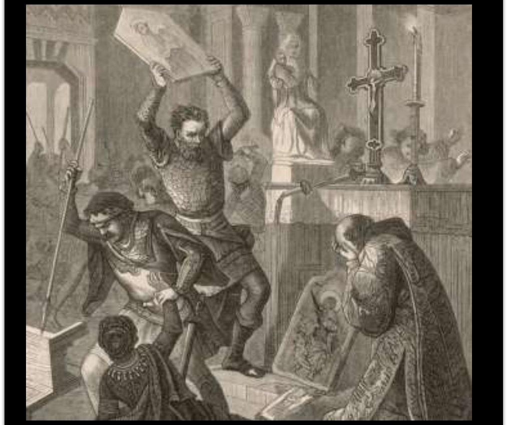
Iconoclasm

'The Isaurian' Leo III ascended to the purple in 717, after forcing the abdication of his predecessor, Theodosius III. Inheriting the empire in a fragile state, he harboured deeply iconoclastic views, believing that icons or images should only be used to portray human subjects – any attempt to depict the divine would be tantamount to idol worship. This view was particularly prominent in the east, where most soldiers came from, and thereby shored up his support among the generals.

In 726, he went so far as to forbid representations of all saints, martyrs and angels, removing 'miraculous' icons and relics – which had long been celebrated in the western provinces. It had been a controversial subject, one that had provoked harsh denunciations from the papacy, sparked riots in Constantinople and even led to rebellion in the Greek islands. When the icon of Christ Antiphonetes was removed from the capital's Chalke Gate, officers were beaten to death by a mob of devout women, sparking a brutal response.

Leo's son Constantine was even more intolerant than his father, penalising monks – who treated icons with particular reverence – with exceptional severity. Monasteries were destroyed and monks made to marry, with some offenders even tortured, blinded and executed. In this manner, the army, government and clergy were, on the surface, brought into line with the emperor's iconoclast leanings. West and east, however, remained more divided than ever.



The Isaurian dynasty's violent campaign against iconography devastated relations with the papacy

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Stauracius. Moving swiftly, the empress began selecting iconophile bishops, and even replacing hostile generals from the largely iconoclast eastern troops. When her governor in Sicily rose up in support of Leo's brothers, it was the palace eunuchs, not the generals, who crushed his revolt.

Yet this was just the start of her troubles. The Abbasid caliph placed his son Harun al-Rashid at the head of an army, 95,800 strong, that was sent raiding towards Constantinople. Though Stauracius brilliantly trapped Harun in a valley, the eunuch was handed over to the enemy by one of his own treacherous generals during negotiations – forcing the empress into a degrading peace treaty, with an annual ransom of 160,000 nomismata. Stauracius washed the stain of dishonour from his name in 783, with a bold campaign across Thessalonica, to Peloponnesus, where he defeated the Slavs, rounding up spoils and tribute aplenty. Sensing a propaganda victory, Irene toured Thrace with her son Constantine, renaming a city Irenopolis, and travelling as far as Philippopolis, taking more Thracian territory in a year than Constantine V had done during his whole reign.

Military glory in tow, when the patriarch Paul died, Irene replaced him with the imperial secretary Tarasius, an unapologetic iconophile. Though the layman's appointment caused a stir, it extended an olive branch to the long-estranged papacy and eastern churches. Irene invited representatives of the churches to an ecclesiastical council in Constantinople, a controversial grand unveiling of her return to the iconophile doctrine.

> Pope Leo III claimed a woman – Irene – could not hold the throne, so named Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor

Signalling her growing position of power, the empress stopped paying the Abbasid tribute and destroyed their base at Adata, before touring Thrace once again. Though such exploits won over Constantine V's generals, the common soldiers were still beholden to his legacy. When the council opened its doors on 17 August, a group of imperial guardsmen burst into the Church of the Holy Apostles, threating to kill anyone who did not leave – bringing proceedings to an abrupt end.

In the aftermath, a seemingly defeated Irene declared a renewed eastern campaign against the Saracens. She ordered the riotous unit eastwards, and replaced it with loyalists, commanded by Stauracius. In a political masterstroke, the empress personally led another army to the Bithynian camp where the mutineers were stationed, and disbanded them. Finally, she reconvened her council at Nicaea – to avoid dangerous temperaments in the capital, with the added propaganda value of calling it the Second Council of Nicaea. There, at Irene's insistence, iconoclasts were given the opportunity to recant, before returning to Constantinople, where the empress and her son signed the acts in purple ink. Finally, after six decades of iconoclasm, the monks could breathe once again.

It was a major coup for the empress, one that deserved to be celebrated – with a wedding for her 16-year-old son. He was betrothed to Rotrude, the daughter of Charlemagne, but when Irene asked the Frankish king to send his 13-year-old east, he declined, claiming he would miss her too dearly. Instead, Irene and Stauracius opted for the

Irene's empire was sandwiched between two powerful contemporaries, Harun al-Rashid and Charlemagne

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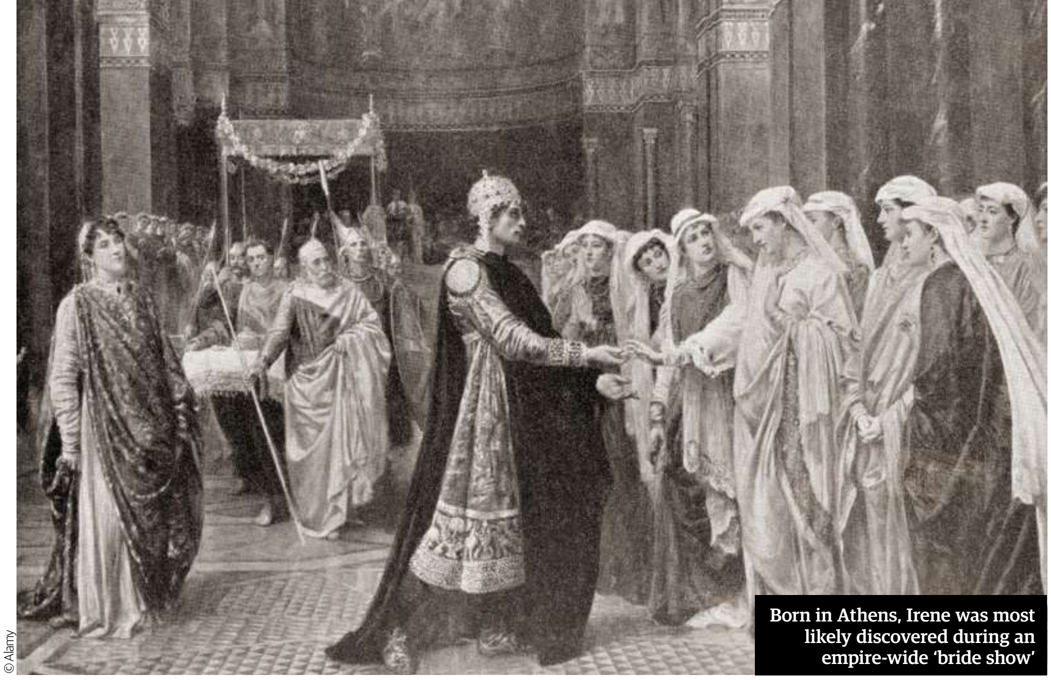

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Born in Athens, Irene was most likely discovered during an empire-wide ‘bride show’

bride show – scouring the empire for a suitable wife, before settling on a saint’s granddaughter, Maria of Amnia.

As the emperor came of age, it seemed Irene’s work had been done. However, with the capable Harun succeeding his brother as caliph and Charlemagne in control of the papacy, these were dangerous times – which called for strong leadership. Irene may have been a woman, but her son was a mummy’s boy. He had not only allowed his mother to choose his wife on his behalf, he also let her rule in his stead. After the birth of his daughter, though, Constantine grew to resent his wife, and his mother even more. For a young emperor, desirous of destiny, it was humiliating to live beneath the yoke of a mother with little heed for his imperial, or personal, sovereignty.

After some military setbacks at the hands of Muslim raiders, Bulgars and even the Franks, popular favour gravitated towards Constantine – who, in turn, began plotting against Stauracius. The eunuch, however, was a step ahead. After he revealed the conspiracy to the empress, she slapped Constantine across the face, grounded him indefinitely and had the army vow to keep him from power so long as she lived. The Armeniac theme, the most powerful Anatolian military province, revolted – and when Irene sent an officer, Alexios Mosele, to bring them to heel, he was instead nominated their leader, proclaiming Constantine the sole emperor. After the other four Anatolian themes followed suit, Irene acquiesced, releasing her 19-year-old son.

“In a year, Irene took more Thracian territory – renaming one city Irenopolis – than Constantine V had done in his whole reign”

Though finally in the limelight, Constantine immediately stepped back into the shadow of his mother. Though she was confined to her living quarters, her supporters all retained their posts. After feeble campaigns against the Abbasids and Bulgars in 792, the emperor released her, recalled Stauracius and commanded his soldiers to recognise her as his fellow emperor – even imprisoning Alexios when the Armeniacs refused. Appalled, the Armeniacs conspired to recall Nicephorus from the church and hand him the imperial purple. Irene and Stauracius, however, beat them to the punch – having Constantine blind Nicephorus, and slit the tongues of his other uncles, rendering them all unquestionably ineligible. For his unwavering support, Constantine foolishly had Alexios blinded and, after quashing the Armeniacs, discharged thousands, branding their faces “Armeniac Conspirator”, allowing the Muslims to swoop in, raiding the undefended border.

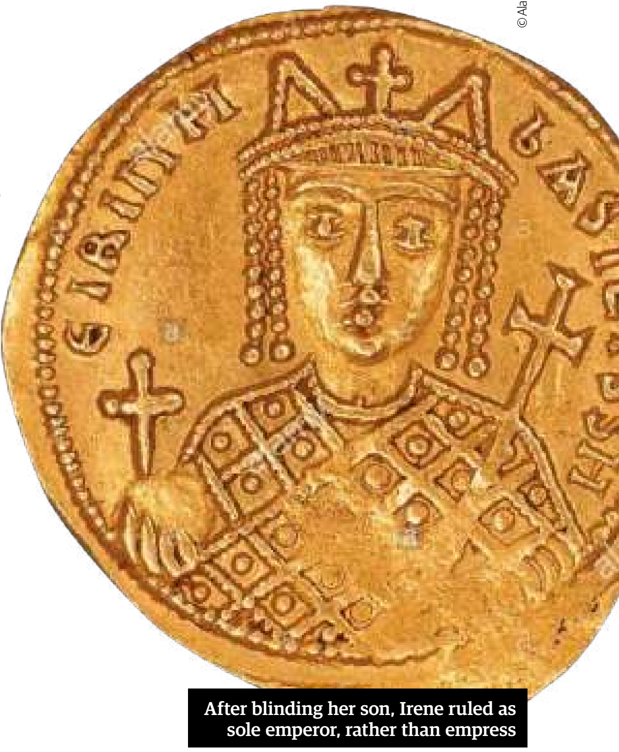
In another act ill-befitting the imperial prestige Constantine, long fed up with his wife, scandalously ‘divorced’ her and married another. Before long, the civil, religious and military establishments shifted back into Irene’s sphere of influence. When the Muslims, sensing weakness, raided Anatolia once again in 797, the empress and her allies decided something needed to be done about her weak son. After barely surviving an attempt on his life at the Hippodrome, Constantine was caught trying to flee across Anatolia and hauled back to the Purple Chamber, the room he had been born in. There, a group of Irene’s agents held him down and blinded him – in a manner so brutal that he later died an agonising, lingering death. Chroniclers described how darkness fell over the capital for two weeks.

With that, Irene had become the first woman to rule the Roman Empire. But it was a hollow victory, one that sent her health and spirit into a landslide. Striking coins celebrating her sole rule, she referred to herself not as empress, but emperor, an unprecedented move that left many questions hanging over her sovereignty. Hoping to silence her detractors, she handed out generous donatives and exempted the church from levies.

Though she ruled alone, Irene still had not won over the army, who, in 798, allowed the Muslims to romp all the way to the Aegean coast, leading to a humiliating resumption of the costly tribute agreement from 782. Soon after, as the emperor suffered a serious illness, her new eunuch advisor Aetius convinced her that Stauracius was plotting to usurp her title. In truth, Stauracius was dying.

On Christmas Day in 800, the empire was rocked by the most humiliating of blows, when the pope crowned Charlemagne ‘Imperator Romanorum’ – Emperor of the Romans. Desperate to salvage some prestige, Irene handed out further donatives, and abolished trade duties in the capital, which her ambitious finance minister, coincidentally named Nicephorus, loudly trumpeted as a financial disaster. Two years later, Charlemagne shockingly offered her his hand in marriage – and a chance to reunify the Roman Empire. Aetius, who sought power for his brother, promptly derailed the proposition. His plots were in vain. When the sickly Irene retreated to her Palace of Eleutherios, the finance minister Nicephorus stormed in, kidnapping her and having the people proclaim him emperor instead. Irene lamented: “I blame my destruction on my sins.”

After a momentous 22-year-rule, Irene was exiled to Lesbos. She died a year later, according to popular legend, spinning wool to make ends meet. Though no saint, she was later canonised by the Orthodox Church, for putting an end to the religious tyranny of iconoclasm.



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After blinding her son, Irene ruled as sole emperor, rather than empress

BASIL
THE BULGAR SLAYER

Underestimated, defeated and overthrown, Basil II emerged from failure as a legendary empire builder and feared warlord

Written by Frances White

Throughout his entire life, Basil II had one primary aim – to transform the Byzantine Empire into the greatest the world had ever seen. He was not concerned with literary culture, he had no love for the educated classes, he showed no great interest in women and fathered no children. Neither was Basil an articulate speaker or a particularly charming person. Under his leadership, however, the Byzantine Empire reached the culmination of its power, a feat only capable due to Basil's unrelenting and ruthless quest to succeed, despite the many obstacles thrown in his path.

Rumours that Theophano killed two of her husbands were likely false and started by rivals, some historians believe

From the beginning, Basil's path to victory was not an easy one - he was born the oldest son of Romanos II and Theophano, the daughter of a poor tavern keeper. Romanos, likely aware of how many knives were swinging above his head (a constant side-effect of being the Byzantine emperor), named Basil and his younger brother Constantine as co-emperors when Basil was only an infant. It was just as well, because three years later Romanos II was dead, aged just 24. The common belief is that he was poisoned by his own wife, though this is unproven.

Aged only five years old, Basil was too young to rule, so his mother married general Nikephoros Phokas. Old habits die hard, however, and Theophano, unhappy with her new husband, is rumoured to have murdered him in his own bed. Phokas was succeeded by his nephew, John Tzimiskes, who very wisely wished to get Theophano as far away as possible, and swiftly exiled her. After Tzimiskes' death, Basil was finally old enough to sit on the throne himself, though he relied heavily on his regent and great uncle, Basil the Chamberlain, who was also a eunuch. Basil the Chamberlain was, for a time, a very reliable regent for young Basil, helping him to eliminate two challenges to his throne from powerful landed families.

However, as so often happens when ambitious relatives taste power, Basil the Chamberlain started pushing his luck too far. He began to act like the emperor himself, giving orders that Basil had not consented to, even wearing the emperor's robes. The young Basil waited and watched, though, learning what he could of military strategy and biding his time.

Then, just before Basil turned 18, and with his ascension to the throne imminent, his uncle tried to spread a rumour that the young ruler was secretly working with the Muslims. He also led a coup to install Bardas Phokas, a powerful aristocrat, as emperor. The young Basil, however, acted first. With support from the army, he ascended the throne earlier than planned, and had his uncle arrested as a traitor. The scheming Basil the Chamberlain was stripped of all his lands and wealth, then sent into exile. The young Basil had watched enough greedy men fight over his birthright to mean that, now it was finally his, he did not intend to lose it easily.

Basil cut an unusual figure as an emperor, who were traditionally considered lavish, exuberant and charismatic men. Basil, in contrast, was shorter than average (though he could ride a horse impressively), with blue eyes and long

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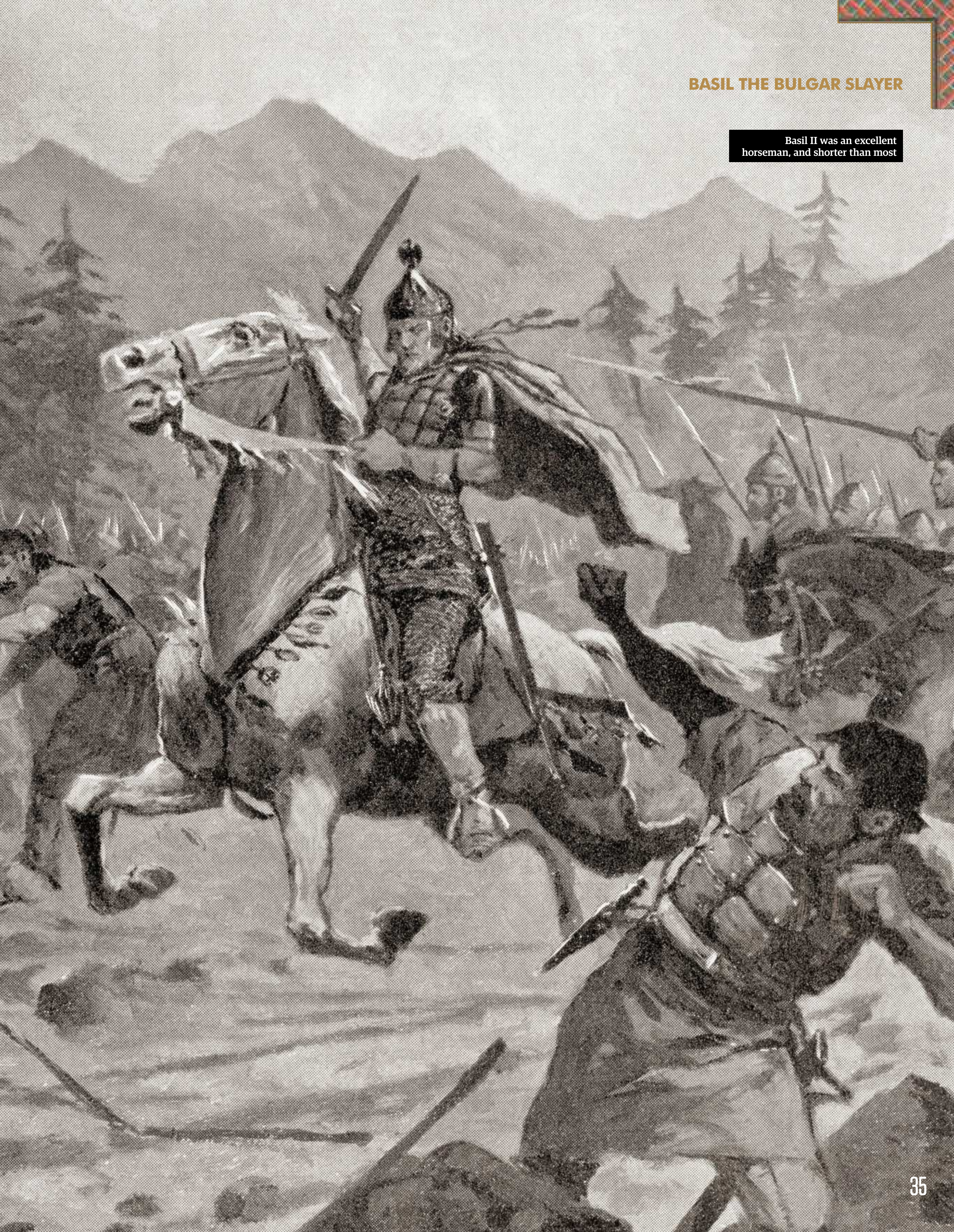


Basil II was an excellent horseman, and shorter than most side-whiskers. He had no interest in finery and was instead a very pious man – even carrying a statue of the Virgin Mary with him into battle. His early childhood experiences had clearly sown a distrust in Basil that made it difficult for anyone to get close to him, and he became renowned for being dour, with a quick temper. Even when he did wear his purple imperial robes, they were a duller shade than would usually be worn. Indeed, Basil seemed more of an austere monk than a great emperor, which hardly inspired lavish displays of devotion from his subjects. But Basil didn't care about inspiring love – he cared about consolidating his power and the reach of his empire, and he set about achieving those ends immediately.

With ambitious and greedy aristocrats nibbling at his heels, Basil was keen to establish his own reputation as a soldier. He set his sights high, aiming to rid his empire of an age-old foe, the Bulgars. About a hundred years earlier, Khan Krum of the Bulgars had achieved the kind of expansion that Basil now aimed to emulate. Krum had succeeded in combining the scattered Bulgarian tribes into one united force, and used that terrifying army to defeat three Byzantine emperors in turn. Some reports suggest he even celebrated one victory by turning the skull of Emperor Nikephoros I into a drinking cup. The Bulgar influence had continued to grow, and now faced Basil under the leadership of Khan Samuel. Under Samuel, the Bulgars continued to pillage and loot Byzantine towns – if Basil could defeat this powerful enemy, his throne would likely be secure.

Determined to prove his worth and reclaim the stolen Byzantine territory, Basil took an army to the Bulgar lands. The Bulgars retreated and – eager not to lose his victory – Basil lay siege to the city of Serdica (modern day Sofia). Yet, while victory seemed inevitable, Basil still lacked battlefield experience. Twenty days of assaults on the city proved fruitless, and his army struggled from a lack of food due to the Bulgars burning all of their crops. In a final brutal blow, the city garrison burst out of the walls, killing many soldiers and burning the siege equipment.

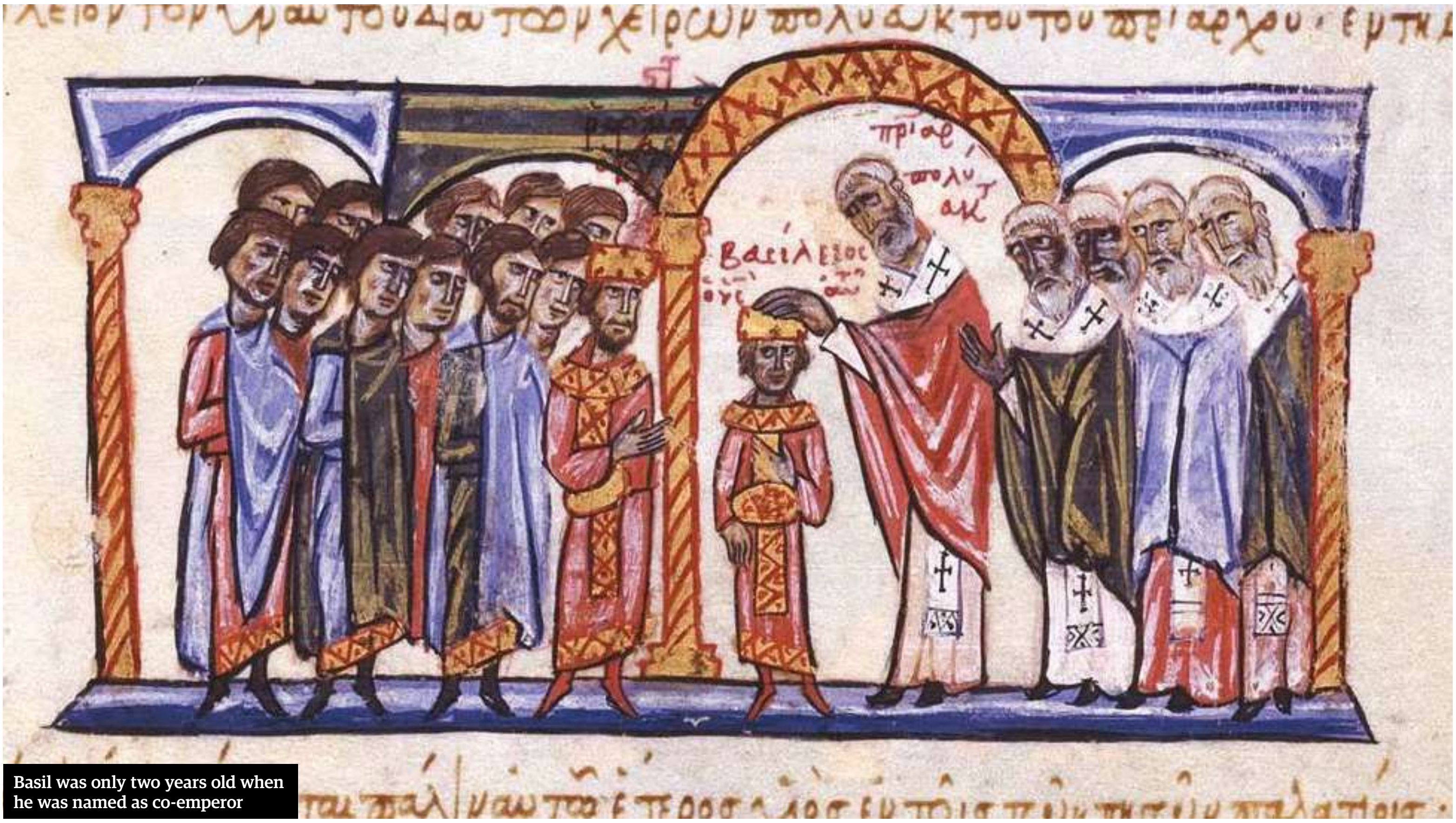
Realising his mistakes, Basil lifted the siege and retreated with the remains of his tired, hungry army. However, Samuel was ready for him. During the retreat, in the narrow Gates of Trajan, the khan ambushed him. Basil's army was routed, the imperial seal captured, and even Basil himself injured. It was a crushing defeat and an absolute failure for Basil. He lost huge numbers of men, with only an elite Armenian unit managing to break away and usher him to safety. It was a humiliating loss for the man determined to prove his worth, and his enemies did not wait long to take advantage.

When he returned home in 987, Basil found an old enemy, Bardas Phokas (the man his uncle tried to install in Basil's place), proclaiming himself emperor. Basil knew that he needed superior forces to defeat the traitor, and so married his sister to Vladimir of Kiev in exchange for a force of 6,000 battle-hardened Vikings. With such might behind his back, Basil was able to restore order and put an end to the rebellion. Three commanders of the rebel army were each given specifically tailored deaths – hanged, crucified and impaled.

> Basil's elite personal bodyguard – the Varangian Guard – was made up of outsiders, such as Vikings, who lacked local loyalties

If Basil had been angry before, he was now furious, and his number one target became the aristocracy. He raised taxes for the nobles who had betrayed him, making them pay the tax arrears of the poor. Another clever strategy he brought in to reduce the power of the nobles was to introduce payment instead of military service in the provinces. This meant the local leaders would not only have less manpower, but that Basil could use his boosted tax revenue to buy himself an army who would remain loyal specifically to him.

Basil went on to achieve victories in Syria against Arab rule, and squashed the dangerous ambitions of the Fatimids. He proved a quick learner. One particular victory in Northern Syria in 995 was achieved by the emperor ensuring his army arrived in unparalleled speed by giving each man two mules – one for himself and one for his pack. Learning from his defeats, Basil became a skilled, organised and devastating force to be reckoned with. And most importantly – he never picked a fight he knew he couldn't win.



Basil was only two years old when he was named as co-emperor

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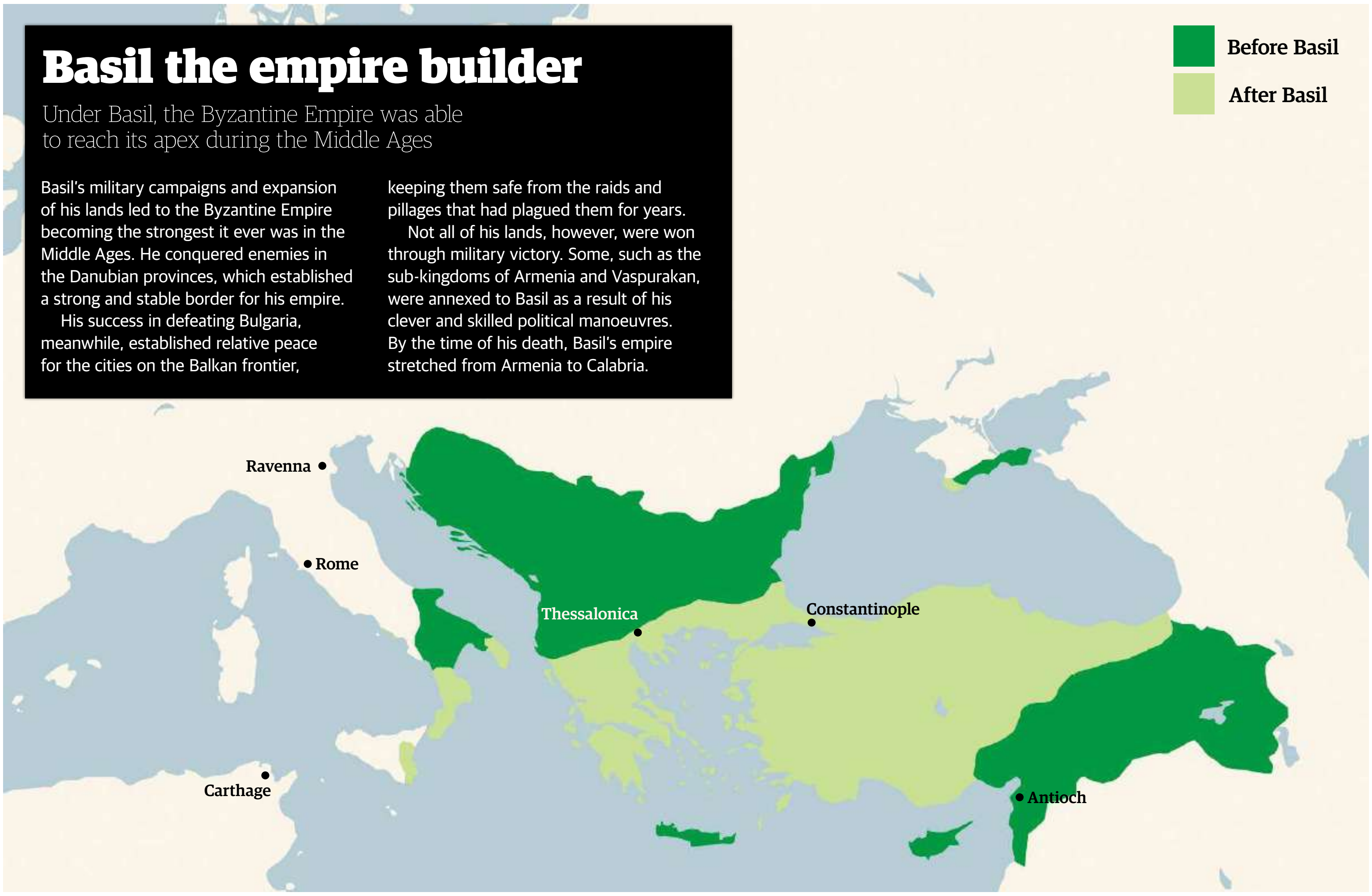
Basil the empire builder

Under Basil, the Byzantine Empire was able to reach its apex during the Middle Ages

Basil's military campaigns and expansion of his lands led to the Byzantine Empire becoming the strongest it ever was in the Middle Ages. He conquered enemies in the Danubian provinces, which established a strong and stable border for his empire.

His success in defeating Bulgaria, meanwhile, established relative peace for the cities on the Balkan frontier, keeping them safe from the raids and pillages that had plagued them for years.

Not all of his lands, however, were won through military victory. Some, such as the sub-kingdoms of Armenia and Vaspurakan, were annexed to Basil as a result of his clever and skilled political manoeuvres. By the time of his death, Basil's empire stretched from Armenia to Calabria.



> "Learning from his defeats, Basil became a skilled, organised and devastating force to be reckoned with"

However, no matter how many victories he won, there was one enemy Basil just couldn't forget – Khan Samuel and the Bulgars.

Samuel had continued to pillage his way across the land, extending his rule from the Adriatic Sea to the Black Sea. Having no fear for Basil and his Viking army, he raided Byzantine towns as far as central Greece. Basil knew that victory against the Bulgars would take faultless organisation and strategic planning, but years after his humiliating defeat, he was finally ready to prove himself. Little by little, Basil and his generals began to reclaim territories from the Bulgars – Greece in 997, Pliska in 1000, Skopje in 1004 and Dyracchion in 1005. Finally, in 1014, with control over both northern and central Bulgaria, Basil took his huge force of men and advanced towards Samuel's capital.

Samuel was aware that the approaching army would have to invade his country through a series of mountain passes, not unlike the one where Basil had been comprehensively beaten before. So Samuel fortified the passes with walls and towers, hoping to lead his old foe into a trap. Initially, this worked. Basil's forces attempted to attack the fortifications at the pass at Kleidion in the Belasica Mountains. The Byzantines were unable to pass through the valley, but the emperor was not perturbed. He ordered his general to move his soldiers around the valley and attack the Bulgars from behind, while Basil continued to assault the wall – meaning the enemy was surrounded.

The Bulgars abandoned their towers to face the attack on their rear, finally allowing Basil to break through. Thousands of Byzantine fighters poured

Even today, Samuel is regarded as a heroic figure in Bulgaria

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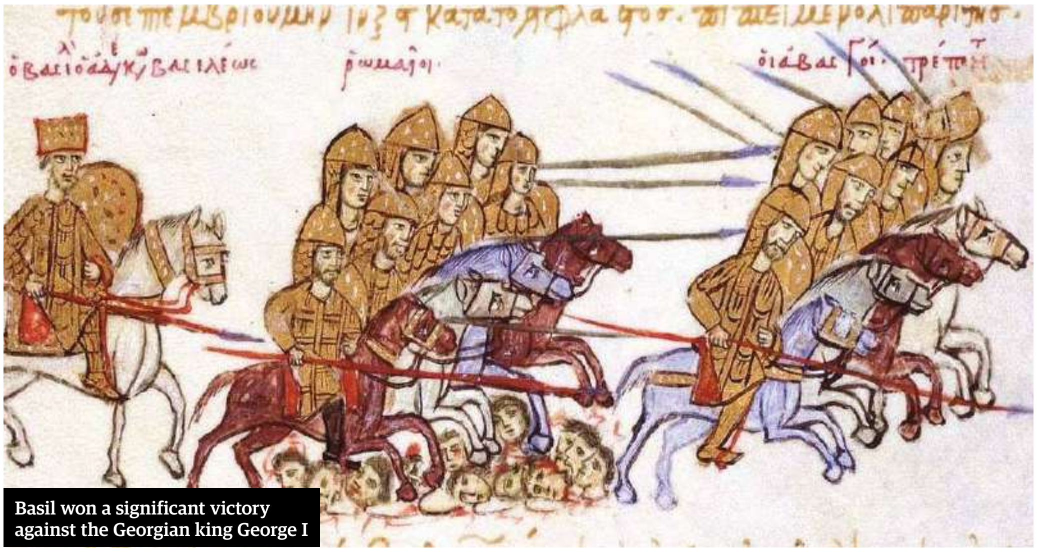

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Basil won a significant victory against the Georgian king George I

through the pass, overwhelming the Bulgars and killing thousands of troops, while the remainder tried to flee for their lives. In a no-doubt gratifying twist of fate, Basil and Samuel's places were reversed, with Samuel only able to flee thanks to his son literally mounting him on his horse and galloping away from the carnage.

With the Bulgar army demolished, Basil took a reported 14,000 men prisoner. He intended to let them go free, but not without first sending a terrifying message to his enemies. He divided the prisoners into groups of 100, then blinded 99 men in each group - either by gouging or burning their eyes out. One lucky man from each group was allowed to keep one eye, but only so that he would be able to lead the others home. The groups of blinded men did indeed make it home to their khan, but Samuel was so shocked and horrified by the sight of thousands of blinded soldiers, that he reportedly had a heart attack right then and there, dying of shock. As a result, Basil hadn't just won a victory - he had created a legendary status for himself. From then on, he became known as Basil the Bulgar Slayer.

There was some limited resistance from the Bulgars in the form of Samuel's sons, but ultimately, Basil's victory proved absolute, and the revered and feared Bulgarian kingdom was at last swallowed up by Basil's Byzantine Empire. The rulers of Croatia, perhaps wisely, accepted Basil's rule and Basil rewarded their offer with honorary titles. Basil marched victorious into the capital of Serdica in 1016 and - considering how long the rivalry with the Bulgars had been raging - treated his new subjects with surprising generosity. He gave Bulgar leaders court titles and high office in his empire, and accepted Bulgarian taxes be paid in kind as opposed to insisting on gold. He also allowed the Bulgarian church to remain independent, as long as he could select the archbishop. This generous treatment ensured that no more rebellions would challenge his rule and, indeed, after Basil died and his policies were reversed, his successors ultimately faced renewed discontent and rebellion as a result.

A soldier and conqueror at heart, Basil continued to campaign to the last of his days, with victories won in Georgian Iberia and Armenia in 1021-1022. Under Basil, the Byzantine Empire had almost doubled in size, and it was known as "a superpower on two continents".

Basil had plans to expand even further into Sicily, but he died in December 1025, aged 65. Basil's reign was the longest of the Byzantine emperors, and the intention was to bury him in a beautiful sarcophagus alongside the other emperors in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. However, keeping to his austere, no-frills character, Basil requested that he be buried in a simpler tomb outside of the city.

> Blinding prisoners no doubt helped crush morale, but it was already the traditional punishment dealt out to rebels

Basil versus the aristocracy

Basil's greatest foe may have been the Bulgars, but he also faced an enemy far closer to home

Basil II had a long and complicated relationship with the aristocracy. Not only did he have to fight to keep their hands off his throne, but he also put in place measures to stop them ever lusting after it again. Basil poured his ruthless military spirit into his domestic policy, with stripping influence from the overpowered nobles becoming a central focus. These great military families displayed excessive wealth and power that made attempts on his throne feasible. Basil expanded legislation that protected the small farmers and peasants from the great families, which in turn helped increase imperial power. Title to land was rigorously inspected and some great estates of powerful families were confiscated. He also forced the nobles to pay off the arrears owed by peasants. This poured so much money into the treasury that underground chambers had to be constructed to hold it all.

Basil's anti-aristocratic policies helped strengthen the imperial house and central government, and put an end to all those pesky military leaders claiming his throne. However, these were the same nobles who had greatly helped Basil defend Anatolia from the Arab threat and also extended the borders of Basil's empire. The nobles had a vested interest in protecting their lands from raids and expanding them to increase their riches. These families formed the backbone of the military, and while stripping their wealth had helped Basil repel threats to his throne, there is some debate as to whether his actions were wise in the long term.

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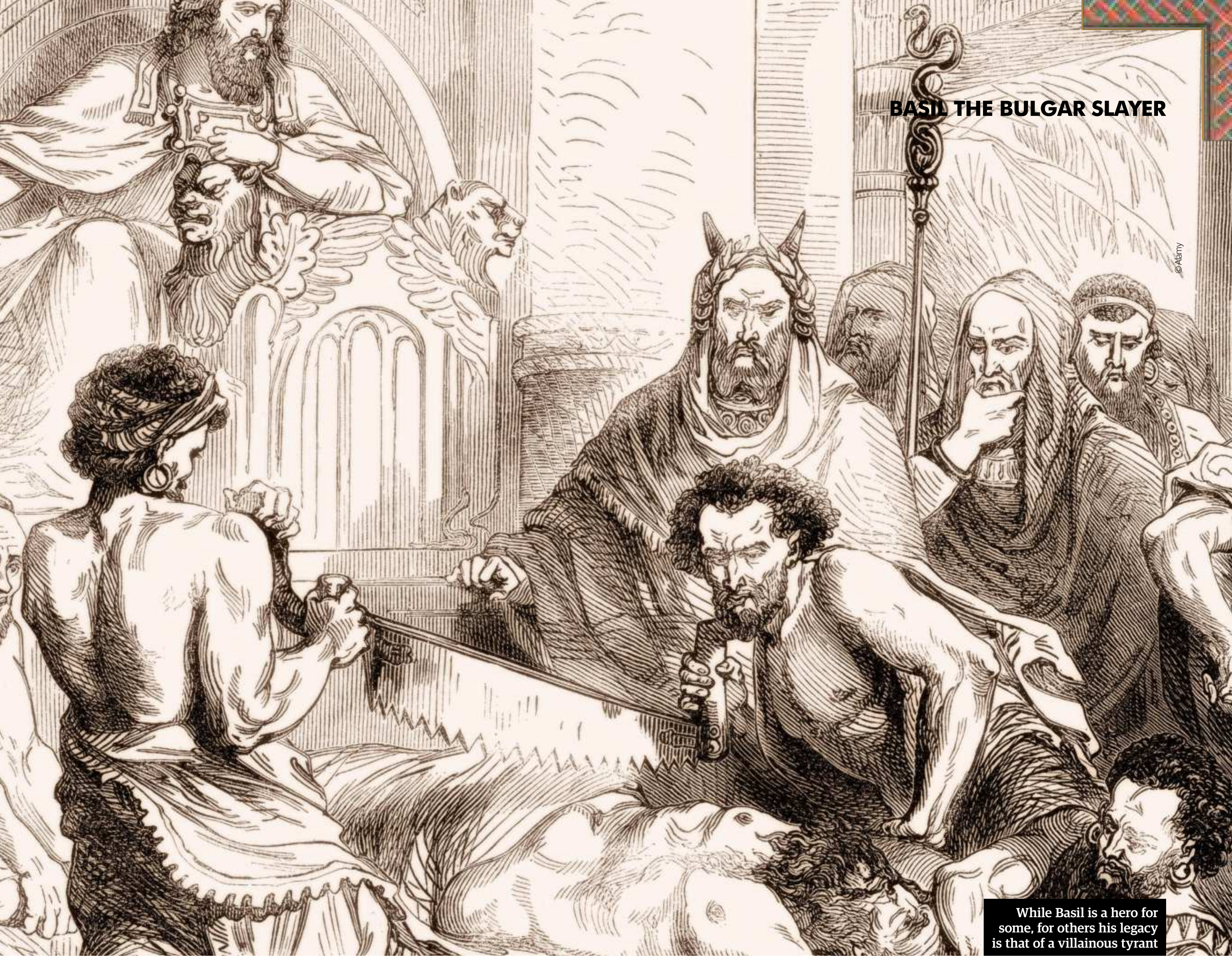
The challenges from Phokas did much to cement Basil II's distrust of the nobles



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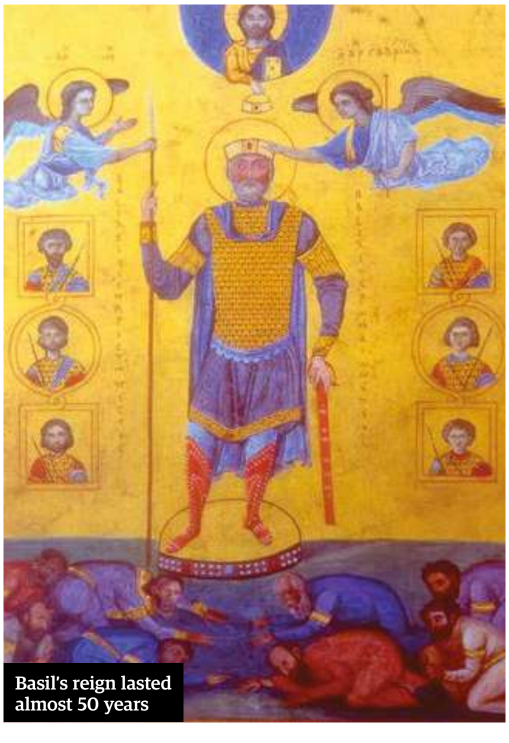
While Basil is a hero for some, for others his legacy is that of a villainous tyrant

> “One lucky man from each group of 100 was allowed to keep one eye, but only so that he could lead the others home”

With Basil having no children, his brother Constantine VIII ruled after his death. Unfortunately, his successors did not display the same determination and military genius as Basil, and the inheritance was squandered within a generation or two, with the once great empire’s fortunes hastily dismantled.

Predictably, due to his rather extreme methods, Basil’s legacy today is a mixed one, being revered as a heroic figure in modern day Greece, but reviled as a despicable villain in Bulgaria. For Greece, Basil represents one of the last periods in history of when a Greek state could truly claim to be a superpower of the world. In this way, Greek adoration of Basil can be compared to British fondness of Queen Victoria, which also often overlooks some of the more brutal elements of rule. There are Greek texts and literature that paint Basil positively, and there is an element of nostalgia around him and his rule. It is, after all, difficult to not be impressed by his achievements in consolidating power and expanding his empire.

For the Bulgarians, meanwhile, Basil has transformed into a monstrous figure, helped no doubt by his nickname of ‘Bulgar Slayer’ and his choice to blind some 14,000 men. Even today, debates about Basil’s actions and his legacy continue, and it seems the legendary Byzantine emperor truly personifies the phrase ‘one man’s hero is another’s villain’.



Basil’s reign lasted almost 50 years

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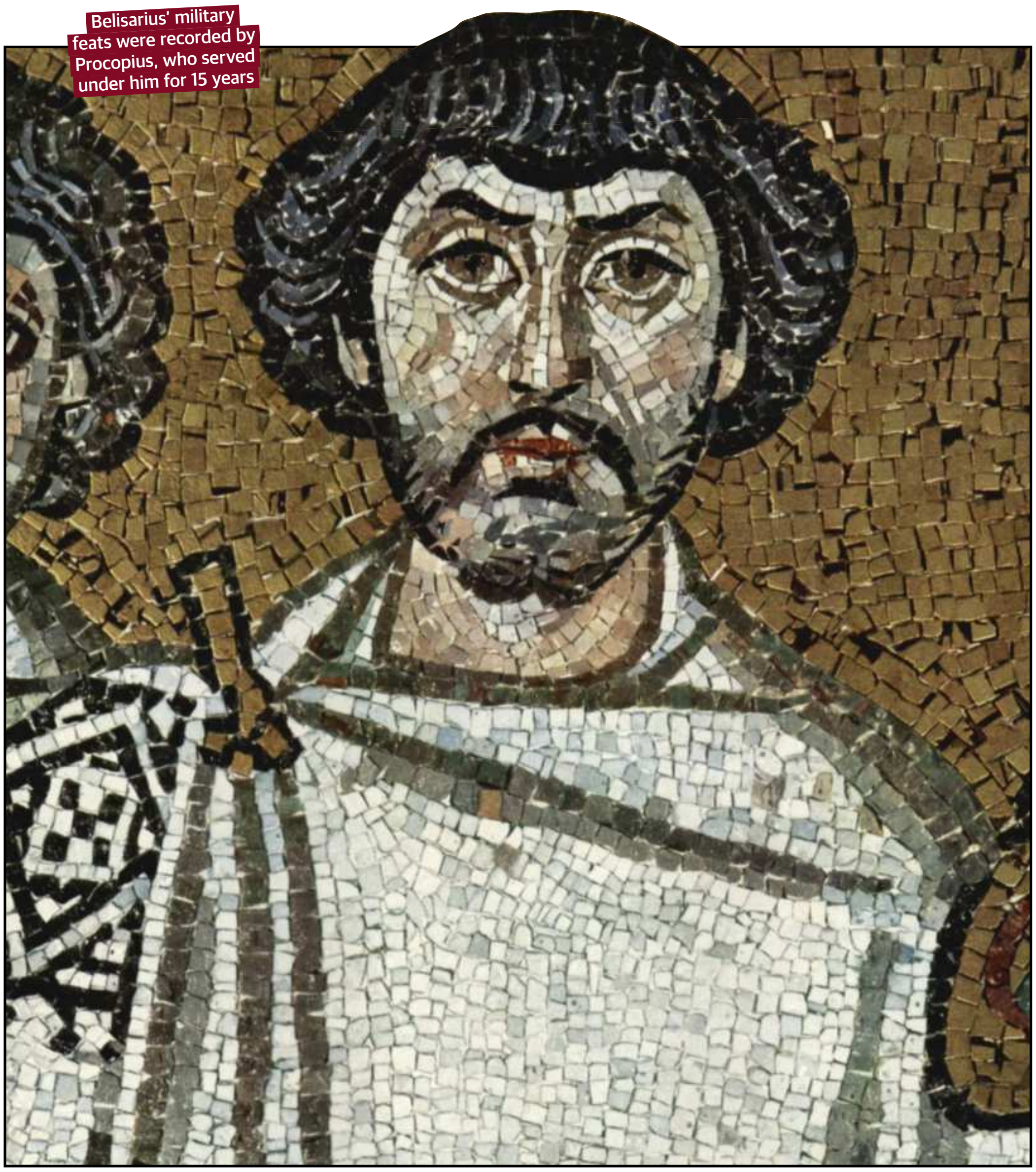
INFLUENTIAL FIGURES OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

Eight Byzantine men whose impact on linguistics, law, medicine, architecture and religion has survived the ages

Written by Katharine Marsh


Belisarius' military feats were recorded by Procopius, who served under him for 15 years

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BELISARIUS

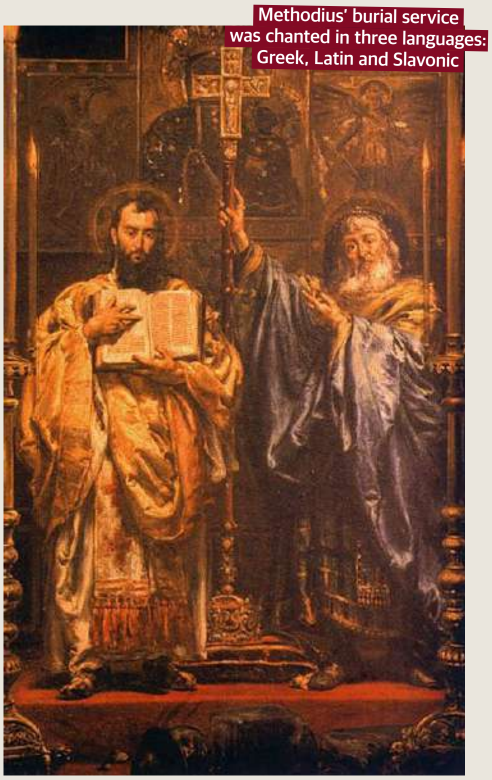
505-565 CE

A great soldier and an even better general, this man's reputation has endured for centuries

Often considered the Byzantine Empire's greatest general, Belisarius came from humble beginnings in Illyria. While little is known about his early years, we do know that he was born to poor parents and that he enlisted in the army under Justin I. However, his military prowess and potential didn't go unnoticed and the emperor's successor, Justinian I, gave him full command of the Byzantine army. Belisarius didn't disappoint. His victory at Dara in 530 saw him become a war hero, and subsequent wins against the Vandals and Ostrogoths only furthered his reputation. In fact, the historian Durant claimed that "no general since Caesar ever won so many victories with such limited resources of men and funds", and when the Nika Riots broke out in 532 CE, Belisarius was tasked with leading the response force, which resulted in a massacre of the protesters.

While his loyalty to the emperor was perhaps one of Belarius' defining characteristics, he was also known for his love of his wife, Antonina, who happened to be a close friend of Empress Theodora. Thanks to this connection he enjoyed some power at court, and he was able to keep his large household bodyguard as he aged. As the centuries went by after his death, Belisarius wasn't forgotten; in fact, he has often been considered the 'last of the Romans' - a title that recognises him as one of the final men to show the values that were at the heart of Roman society.

> "No general since Caesar ever won so many victories with such limited resources of men and funds"



Methodius' burial service was chanted in three languages: Greek, Latin and Slavonic

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SAINT METHODIUS

815-884 CE

One half of a dynamic duo of alphabet-creating brothers, Methodius continued their work after his sibling Cyril's death

Venerated as a saint alongside Saint Cyril, in both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, Saint Methodius was one half of the team of brothers who created the Glagolitic alphabet. However, after Cyril's death in 869, Methodius continued their ministry alone. After the brothers' success in proselytising to the Slavs, Pope Adrian II sent Methodius back to the region as an archbishop, and all of Moravia fell under his ecclestical control.

Methodius continued to disseminate Christian literature in the Slavic language, as instructed by the papacy, but Methodius found himself facing the ire of a group of German bishops, who arrested and imprisoned him for two and a half years. This didn't stop him, though - after being released by Pope John VIII, he continued his work with the Slavs. But the Germans weren't finished - they tried to arrest him again for some of his teachings, but Methodius stood before the pope to explain himself. Able to return to his archdiocese once more, he spent the rest of his life translating the Old Testament into the alphabet he had created with his brother.

> "He spent the rest of his life translating the Old Testament into the alphabet he created"

ISIDORE OF MILETUS

6TH CENTURY CE

One of the men tasked with designing one of the most famous buildings in the world

Hagia Sophia is known globally for its stunning architecture and interior, and one of the men we have to thank for this is Isidore of Miletus. Courtesy of their backgrounds in mathematics, Isidore and his colleague Anthemius of Tralles put their skills to the test to deliver on the emperor's brief - to build the greatest church in the Roman Empire. That's just what they achieved in 537 CE.

The spacious inside was created by the construction of an enormous domed roof, which looms 55 metres above the ground. It was supported by four triangular pendentives, a brand new invention that rested the weight of the dome on a square without columns clogging up the room. It did, however, collapse in 557. The second version, designed by Isidore the Younger, possibly Isidore of Miletus' nephew, was much more stable.

Not much else is known about Isidore of Miletus. In fact, it's a rarity we even know the architect's name as this was uncommon for the period. Nonetheless, his name has gone down in history as one of the creators of a building that is still worshipped in today, some 1,500 years later.

Isidore came to prominence teaching stereometry and physics

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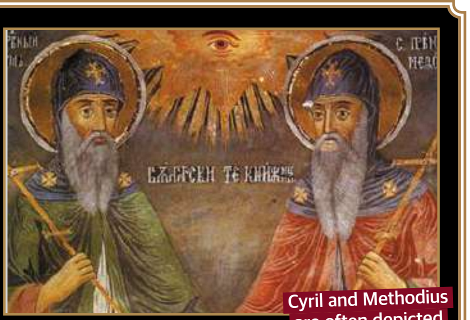

Cyril and Methodius are often depicted together due to their co-creation of the Glagolitic alphabet

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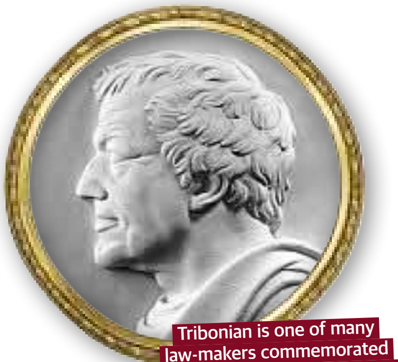
SAINT CYRIL

827-869 CE

Methodius' brother and partner in creating a new alphabet

Saint Cyril was actually born Constantine in Thessaloniki. The son of a military officer, he was the youngest of seven brothers. A remarkably talented linguist from his early days, he would go on to co-create the Glagolitic alphabet with his brother Saint Methodius - which enabled them to translate the Bible into Slavic when bringing Christianity to the region as missionaries. The Glagolitic alphabet later formed the basis of the Cyrillic script, which is still used today as the alphabet for Russian and other Slavic languages.



Tribonian is one of many law-makers commemorated with a plaque in the US House of Representatives

TRIBONIAN

470-541 CE

An ancient law-maker who worked closely with Justinian I

Tribonian was a man with high aspirations, and he certainly achieved them. One of the most well-known legal minds of the Byzantine Empire, he has been credited with helping to create the Code of Justinian - the collection of laws and legal interpretations that was sponsored by the prolific Emperor Justinian I and put together in 528-29 CE. His illustrious career saw him be appointed magister officiorum, or master of offices, before rising to the top job as minister of justice in September 529.

Accusations of corruption, however, saw him removed from office in January 532 during the Nika Riots - but that didn't stop him working. During his time away from the limelight, Tribonian continued to work on a new edition of the Code and other legal projects, and he was back as a quaestor by 535. After that, the only thing to remove him from his powerful position was his death in 541.

Despite his achievements, Tribonian's legacy hasn't fared too well. During the Renaissance he was known as the man who had ruined Roman law by making changes to items that were put into the Code of Justinian and other publications of the time.

"Accusations of corruption, however, saw him removed from office in January 532 during the Nika Riots - but that didn't stop him working"

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MICHAEL PSELLOS

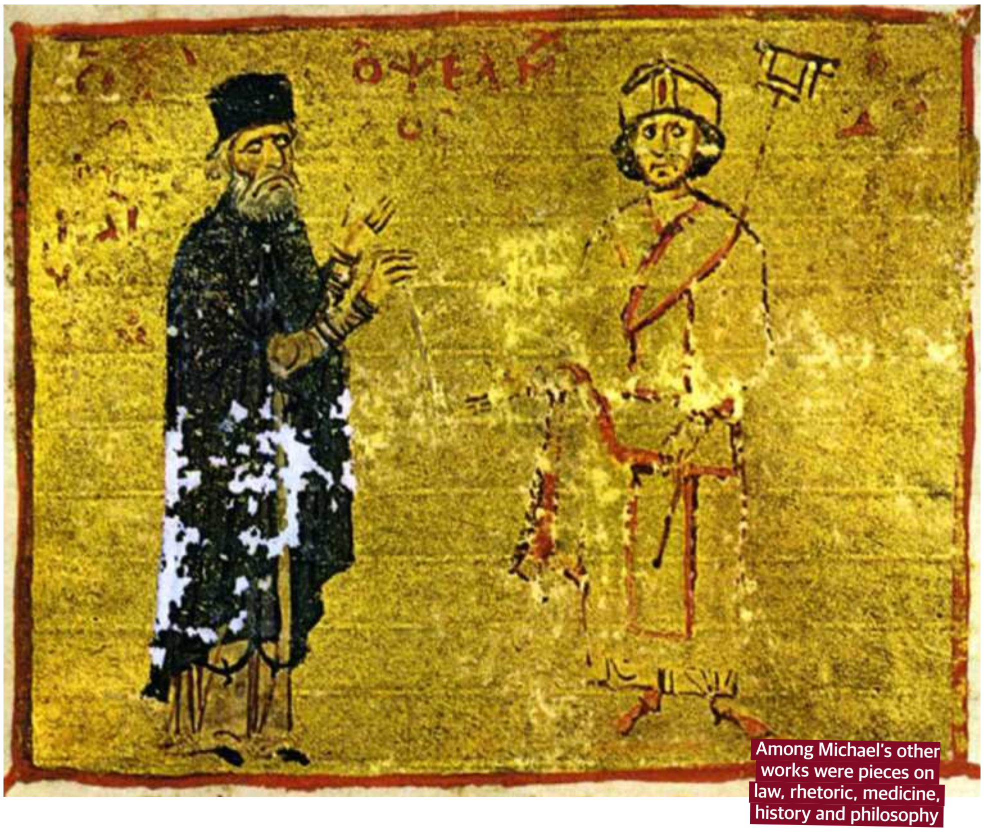
1018-1082 CE

The chronicler who told us so much about 10th and 11th Century Byzantine emperors

A historian and writer, Michael Psellos is known for the *Chronographia*, a collection of biographies detailing the lives of Byzantine emperors and empresses from 976 to 1078. In this work he tries to unpick the cause of the empire's decline after Basil II's tenure, and there was a reason that it was he who wrote it.

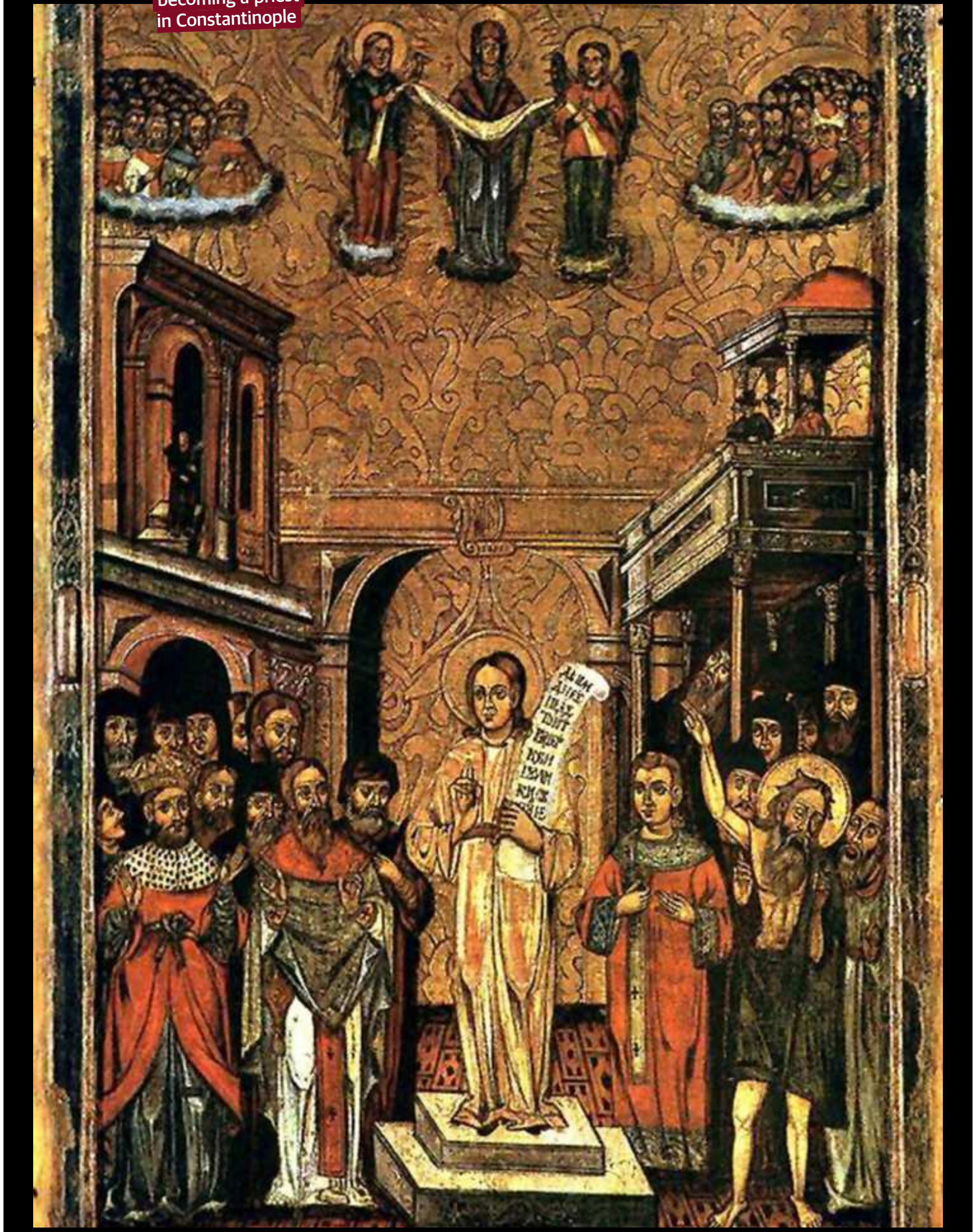
Michael had been a child prodigy before embarking upon his career at the imperial court in Constantinople. He soon found himself advisor to emperors, though not all of them were keen on him. A disagreement with Constantine IX saw Michael leave the capital and head to Mount Olympus to become a monk - it was here that he gained his name, as from birth he had been called Constantine. However, he was eventually invited back to Constantinople by the emperor and appointed head of the city's university with the title hypatos ton philosophon, or consul of the philosophers. He would go on to change the empire's philosophical view from Aristotelian to Platonic.

His career didn't stop there - he tutored Michael VII before becoming his chief minister, and his inside knowledge of the imperial court certainly helped when he was composing the *Chronographia*.



Among Michael's other works were pieces on law, rhetoric, medicine, history and philosophy

"Paul of Aegina's seven-volume encyclopaedia of medicine and surgery - covering everything from leprosy to venom - was used as a textbook for doctors and surgeons for 800 years"


Romanos was a deacon at Berytus before becoming a priest in Constantinople

SAINT ROMANOS THE MELODIST

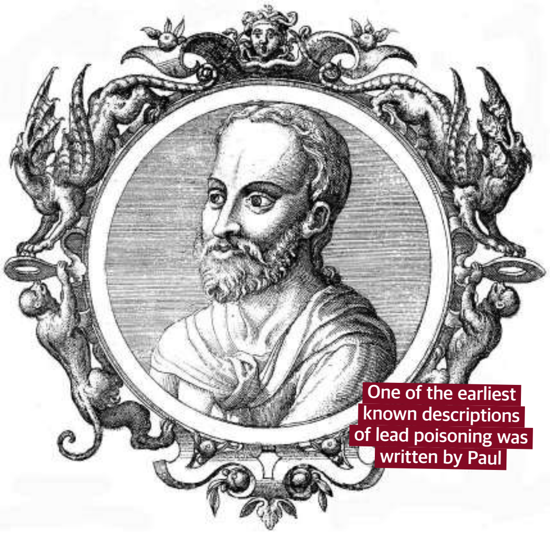
6TH CENTURY CE

Meet the man who brought beautiful music to the Byzantine church

The story goes that Romanos wasn't a good reader or singer. One Christmas Eve he tried to read the kathisma verses in Hagia Sophia, but he performed terribly and the priests ridiculed him. That night, though, as he prayed, he was visited by the Mother of God who told him to eat a scroll she handed to him. Suddenly, miraculously, he gained an understanding of music and hymnography.

While it isn't known when exactly Romanos was born - just that he flourished in the 6th Century - we do know that he was born to humble parents in Syria, and that he started out his religious life following the Jewish faith before converting to Christianity.

What won't be forgotten about Romanos is his lasting legacy on the Orthodox Church, which is the source of his epithet - he invented the kontakion, or chanted sermon, giving a more poetic edge to Byzantine church services. He is said to have composed more than 1,000 such hymns, through which he explored Jesus' life, including *On The Nativity, On The Presentation In The Temple* and *On The Resurrection*. Less than 100, however, have survived.


One of the earliest known descriptions of lead poisoning was written by Paul

PAUL OF AEGINA

625-690 CE

The physician behind our knowledge of Byzantine medicine and surgery

When it comes to knowing about medicine and surgery in the 7th Century, Paul of Aegina has us covered. The author of *Epitomae Medicae Libri Septem*, or *Medical Compendium in Seven Books*, he wrote down almost everything that was known about medicine in the West when he was working in the mid to late-600s.

Originally written in Greek, Paul's encyclopaedia included everything from leprosy and burns to hallucinogens and venom. It was used as a textbook for doctors and surgeons for roughly 800 years, with reprints issued in Venice and Basel in 1528 and 1538 respectively. Each book was dedicated to a particular topic, arguably the most well known of which being the sixth, the focus of which was surgery. In it, Paul outlines operating methods for a variety of maladies, as well as explaining his reasoning for each incision.

While much of Paul's work was handed down from the ancient forefathers of medicine, such as Hippocrates and Galen, he did pioneer the idea of stitching together damaged nerves. His writings influenced many later medics, such as Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi, Ibn Sina and Al-Zahrawi.

ANNA KOMNENE UNCROWNED LITERARY EMPRESS

The life and work of Byzantium's greatest female author - daughter of an emperor and eyewitness to the First Crusade

Written by Nathan Websdale

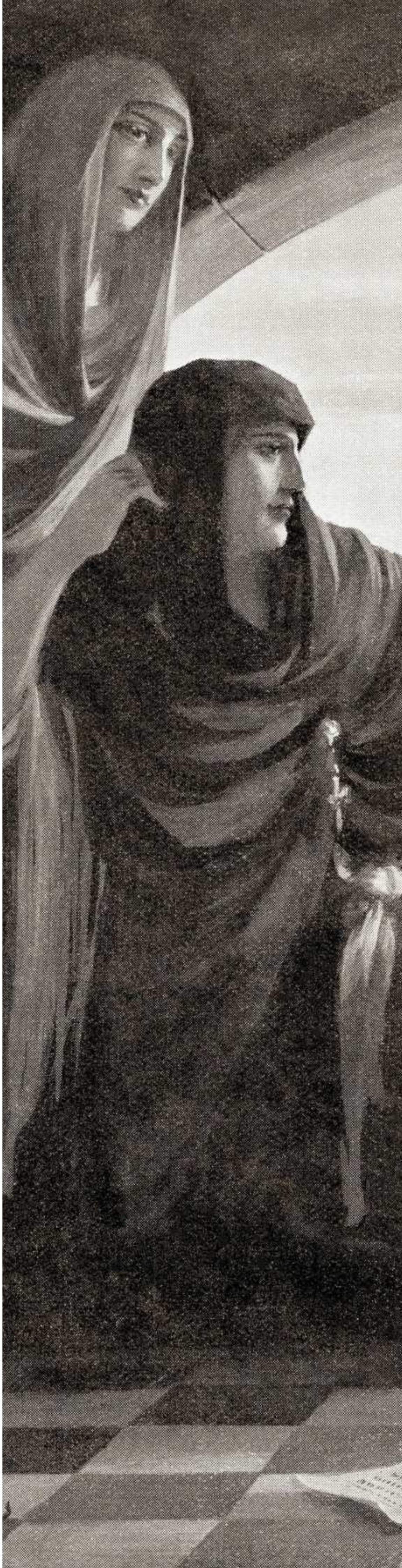
Birthed within the purple marble chamber of the Great Palace of Constantinople, Anna Komnene (1083-1142) was born to a throne she never received. Being the first child of the union between the two military aristocratic families of the Komnenoi and the Doukai - the alliance that had brought her father Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) to the throne in 1081 - ensured for Anna a position of prominence and opportunity. For the first years of her life, the daughter of the fledgling Komnenian dynasty was considered heir apparent and raised with the finest education in Constantinople. As an adult, she developed her prowess, running a literary salon and discussing the latest rhetoric, philosophy, and science. Anna Komnene's academic circles produced commentaries and histories within the Byzantine capital that are a testament to the skill of the 11th and 12th Century Eastern Roman elite. The historical account she wrote of her father tells the modern reader the interests and actions of the courts of both her father and of John II (1118-1143), the brother she tried to usurp.

The porphyra stone walls of the ancient natal room in the royal palace granted the epithet of porphyrogénnētos to the imperial members delivered within, along with a societal recognition that one 'born of the purple' could, with the right support, invoke a claim to the imperial title that bypassed 'western' notions of lines of succession and primogeniture (first born male).

Anna Komnene's place in history rests on two of her actions. The first was her attempt to displace her brother and seize the throne for her husband and herself upon Alexios' death. Side-lined after the birth of her brother Ioannes (Latinised as John) in 1087, Anna had been betrothed to Konstantinos Doukas with the intention of their joint succession to the crown. For Anna, it was not to be. John was Alexios' true-born porphyrogénnētos son and grew to be a capable military leader, an important feature in 12th Century Byzantium. At Alexios' deathbed, John overcame the joint manoeuvrings of Anna and her mother, and in removing a ring from his ailing father's hand, was proclaimed by the people as emperor.

Porphyra, a rare and expensive purple stone, would be used to line a special palace chamber where royal babies were born

Anna, though, was not so easily dissuaded. She considered herself to "resemble her father… in all things" and attempted once more to assassinate her brother a year later. For this she was confined to the Monastery of the Virgin Kecharitomene (Full of Grace) within the capital and removed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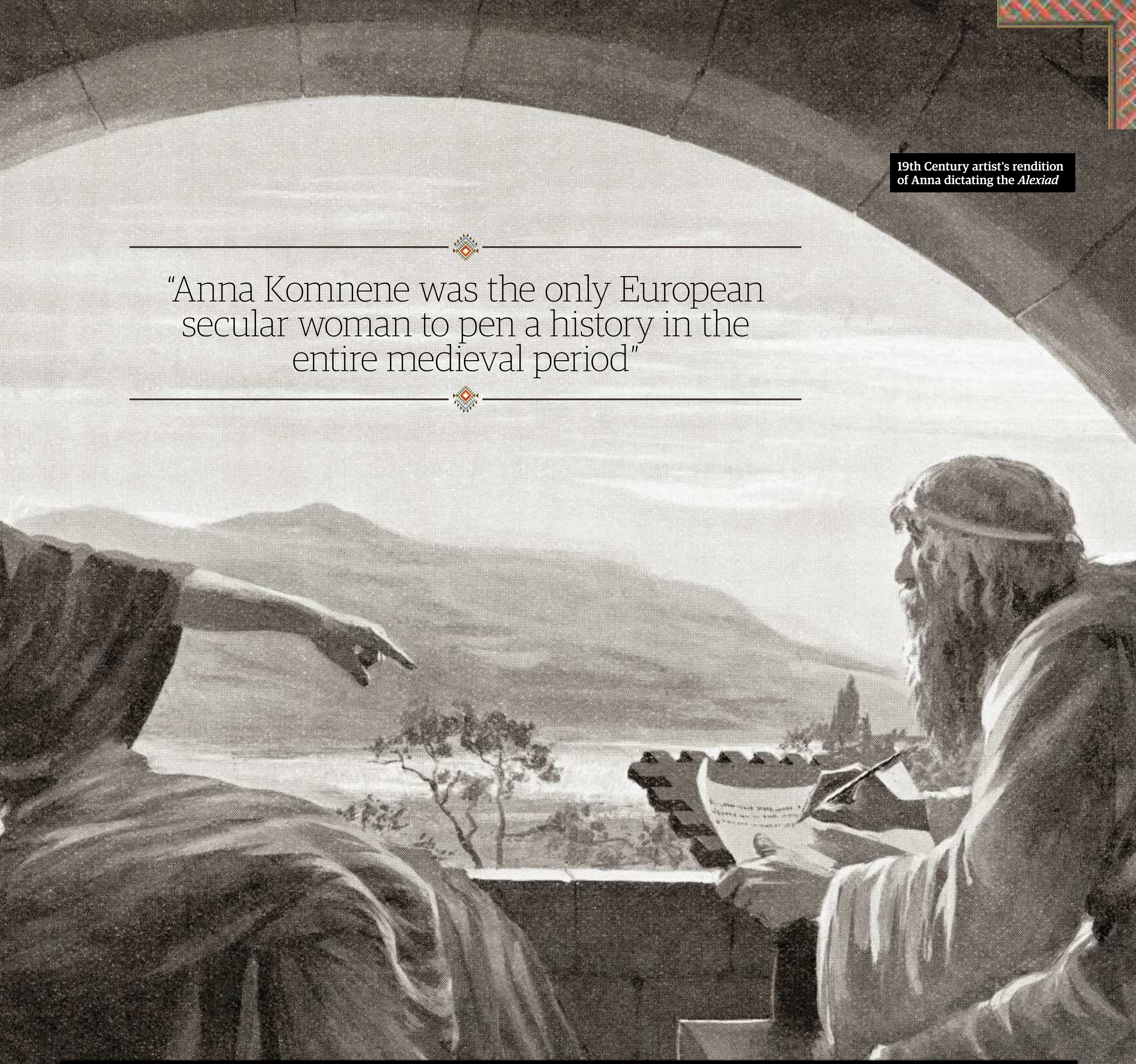


19th Century artist's rendition of Anna dictating the *Alexiad*

> "Anna Komnene was the only European secular woman to pen a history in the entire medieval period"

Alexios I Komnenos

Usurping the throne of Nikephoros III Botaneiates at the age of 33, on Easter Sunday in April 1081, Alexios I Komnenos took charge of a bankrupt empire economically ruined by the devaluation of coinage. It was also disrupted by claimants and dependent upon a network of Turkish and Armenian allies to hold the once heartland cities of Anatolia, to which Byzantine populations had fled after Turkish invasions.

The first decade of his long reign witnessed assaults on three sides and the collapse of the patchwork of Anatolian strongmen, as well as the loss of the great metropolis of Antioch, called "the third city of the world" by Byzantines (after Constantinople and Rome). The collapse hit breaking point in 1092 when the Turk Chaka Bey launched the first Turkish navy from Smyrna and threatened Constantinople itself, causing Alexios to look to the West for aid. The result was the First Crusade. Marching initially under imperial banners, Alexios and the Crusaders began the Komnenian Restoration, as they collectively retook Nicaea, Smyrna, the rich Meander Valley and Cilicia. The alliance, however, unravelled at the Siege of Antioch. Both sides pointed the finger of blame at Alexios, who did not march to the battle.

The consequences were vast, with the Crusaders being unleashed to establish their own independent states, resentful of the failed Byzantine promises. The respite they had brought, however, allowed Alexios to reform the coinage, introducing the new 20.5 carat hyperpyron that would remain reasonably stable for 200 years. Alexios died naturally, having secured a dynasty that would rule for a century.

Alexios presented here as despot, successfully restored the gold coinage and minted the hyperpyron

Image Source: Classical Numismatic Group

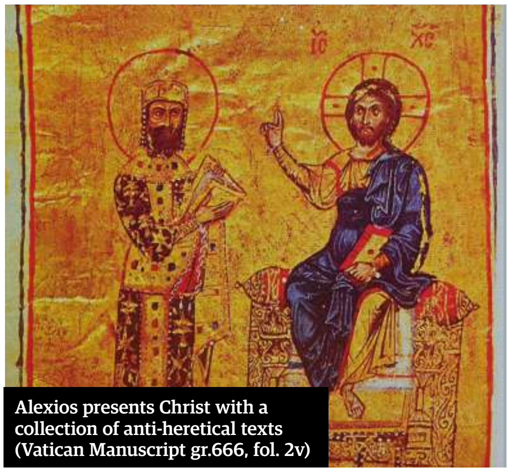


Image Source: Wiki

Alexios presents Christ with a collection of anti-heretical texts (Vatican Manuscript gr.666, fol. 2v)

Empresses in Byzantium

Anna Komnene was let down by her own husband Nikephoros Bryennios, who refused to challenge John for the throne. She was not without reason to believe a woman could rule in Constantinople after the death of her father. Dynastic succession in Byzantium was never straightforward and only required the support of Constantinople and the Church. Being a porphyrogénnētē (purple-born) helped to encourage the belief that an individual was ordained by God to rule – it had recently brought sisters Zoë (1028-1050) and Theodora (1042-56) to the throne when the Makedon dynasty was left bereft of male heirs. In 1067, meanwhile, Eudocia had inherited the empire from her husband, acting as regent on behalf of her sons. These were surely the women Anna sought to emulate.

Constantinople had warmly accepted Zoë and Theodora on account of their purple birth and rallied against any attempt to sideline them. Zoë acted as 'emperor-maker' for three successive husbands – when one tried to banish her from office, he found the city rallying against him. Michael Psellos, our source for much of the court drama in the mid-11th Century, refers to the palace in this period as the gynaeconitis, or 'the women's chambers'. His strange and somewhat unflattering tales tell of Zoë spending all her time creating perfume within her chambers; boiling huge vats of liquid on large braziers that heated the palace, even in winter; and using ointments that kept her face unwrinkled even at 72. Regardless, both sisters were well loved by the people and are further examples that popular support and a claim could secure the throne and scepter regardless of gender.

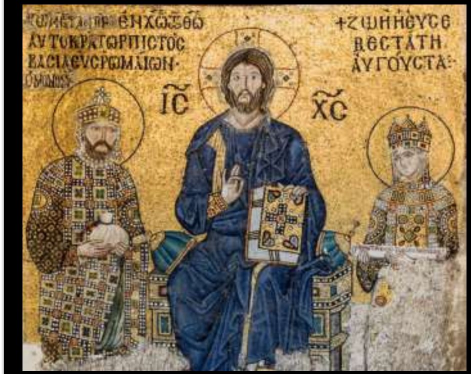


Image Source: Myrabella

Empress Zoë presents her faith to Christ. Her husband's face changed three times with her marriages

from political affairs. These events would not be so well known had Anna not then used her time and considerable literary skill to create her second great action – an epic narrative of the events of her father's reign, known as the *Alexiad*, an homage to Homer's *Iliad*, which artfully captures her father's life from boyhood to deathbed. Detailed within are his struggles against the "barbarian" invasions of the Normans, the Turks and the Pecheneg nomads north of the Danube. For Anna, Alexios was the guiding hand of state throughout his long 37-year reign, and his loss was both personal for Anna and devastating for the Byzantine people. She remarks, somewhat unfairly to John, that they now suffered "the stupidity of the successors to the throne".

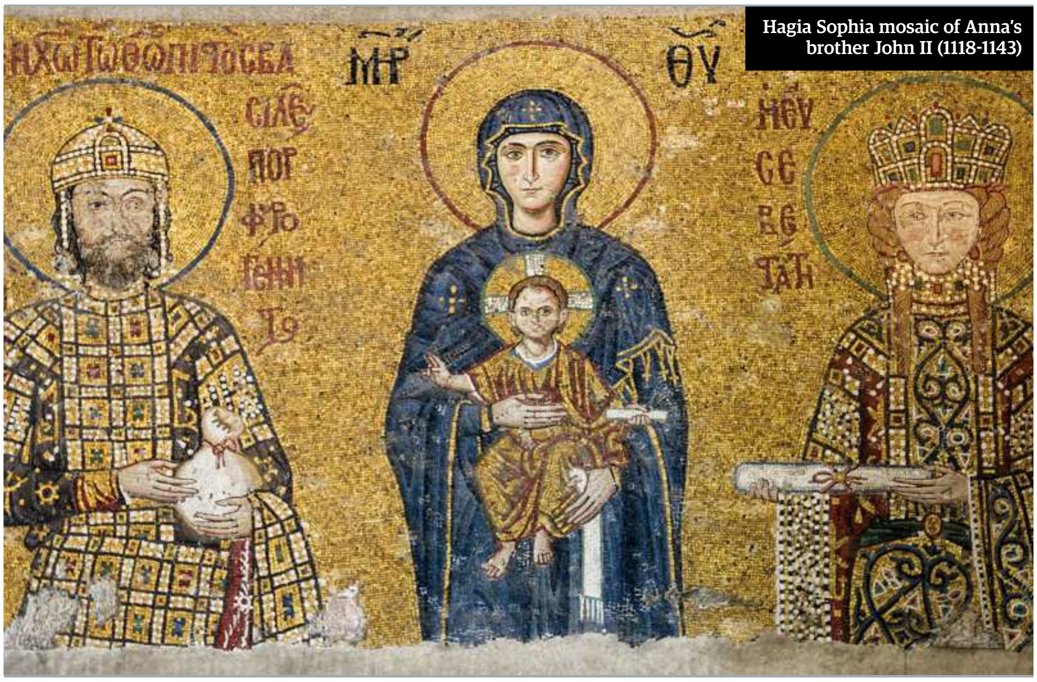
The *Alexiad*'s tone is equal parts epic and military history and its very existence has granted Anna the distinction of being the first woman to write a history in a European language, and the only secular European woman to pen a history in the entire medieval period. Written in Atticising (Classical) Greek and not completed until at least the 1140s, the *Alexiad* provides a uniquely Byzantine viewpoint – not only of a princess eulogising her father, but of the period when both Eastern and Western Christendom, plus Islam, entered into greater exchange, clashing and blending more than ever before.

The eastern provinces of Byzantium had been reeling from Turkish raids since the 1050s, but imperial control began to rapidly deteriorate after the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, when Emperor Romanos IV (1068-1071) himself was captured and brought in submission before Sultan Alp Arslan, Turkish for 'Heroic Lion'. Civil war ensued and Turkish bands served as mercenaries for different claimants, taking cities as payment and encouraging further migration until, by 1081, the failed aspirations of several noblemen had cost Byzantium almost half of its territory. This was the struggle before Alexios, and Anna – following in the ancient vein of Herodotus and Thucydides – dedicated the *Alexiad* "to recount the deeds done by my father for they should certainly not be lost in silence, or swept away, as it were, on the current of time into the sea of forgetfulness".

Anna made her father the central figure of a narrative that identifies Alexios as the quick-witted classical hero Odysseus, who successfully navigates the turbulent waters of state against external assaults, while telling us how the Byzantines viewed the outside world. Historians have regarded Anna's identification as uncannily nuanced. Odysseus lacked foresight during his long journey home, being buffeted by events to the extent that reaction to danger was more successful than long-term planning. Such a motif dominates the *Alexiad* – trials come the emperor's way, which he overcomes through guile. There are few long-term policies beyond the protection of an abstract notion of ta pragmata ('the affairs of state', and a general Byzantine term for governance).

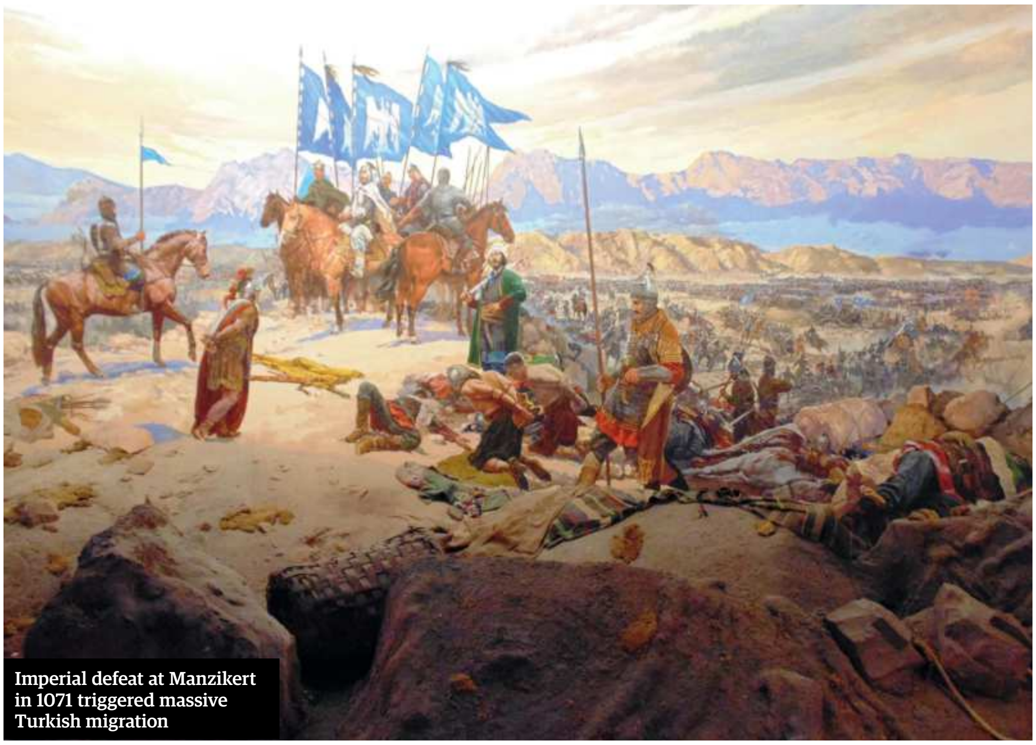
Had the text been created before the 11th Century, the international aspect of the *Alexiad* would have been more constrained. However, the era of the Crusades begins with Alexios. Anna's text is valuable because it discusses the passage of the First Crusade (1095-99), to which she was a teenage eyewitness. She depicts a Constantinople bewildered by the unprecedented arrival of tens of thousands of Western Europeans, whom

> Anna is believed to have started writing the *Alexiad* – divided into 15 books and a prologue – at the age of 55



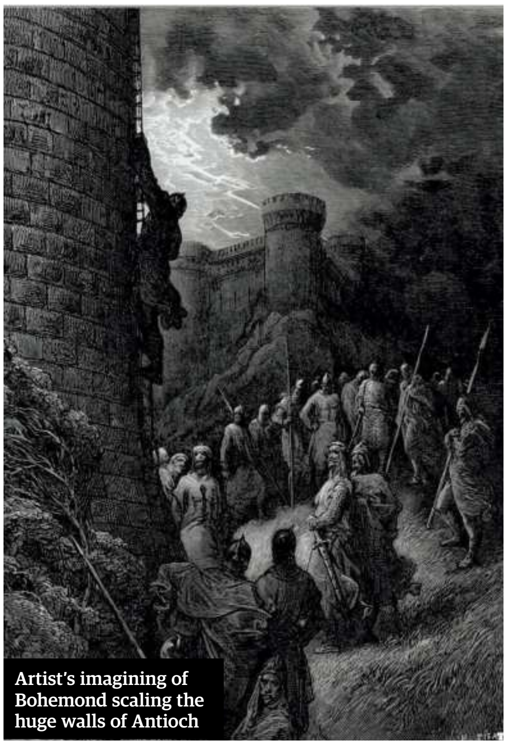
Hagia Sophia mosaic of Anna's brother John II (1118-1143)

Image Source: Myrabella



Imperial defeat at Manzikert in 1071 triggered massive Turkish migration

Image Source: O.Mustafin



Artist's imagining of Bohemond scaling the huge walls of Antioch

Image Source: Gustave Doré

Byzantines called Latins, marching to combat the Turkish invasions and to seek the capture of Jerusalem. Anna describes a "host of civilians outnumbering the sands of the sea shore or the stars of heaven… streamed towards us in full force… preceded by locusts" and the result planted Frankish Catholic Crusader states in the traditional Eastern Byzantine theatre. Inevitably, there was a culture clash. Anna described her fascination at the West's use of crossbows, and a Western priest's outrageous custom of fighting alongside the soldiery.

But this pales against her depiction of Bohemond of Antioch, the Norman Crusader who captured Antioch, and who hoped to fulfil his father's dream of conquering the Byzantine Balkans. He emerges throughout the narrative as a sort of anti-Alexios. Using means Anna calls "exceedingly sordid, and yet exceedingly ingenious", Bohemond in 1108 perverted the early Crusading spirit into a just war upon the religiously divisive Byzantines.

The First Crusade evolved from a Byzantine appeal for military aid - the Crusaders had not been expected to keep the lands

The ensuing battle of wits, and Alexios' ultimate victory, is the triumph of the narrative. For its strength, the *Alexiad* does have weaknesses that make its use complex - for example that Anna exonerates her father from any role in the Crusade's origin. No mention is made of the letters modern historians know existed between Alexios and the Count of Flanders, asking for knights to serve in the shattered imperial armies against the Turks. These words, used extensively by the Catholic Church to fan the militant religiosity of the West into a mission to save their Eastern brethren, are absent as Anna protects Alexios' legacy from the Crusade's destructive result.

This should not take away from sections in which Anna captures the wars of Byzantium with a unique eye. She informs the reader that she personally accompanied her father on several campaigns, and it appears her exile to the monastery isolated her neither from the visits of Byzantine veterans, nor caused separation from her politically active husband. After the premature death of her betrothed, Anna married Nikephoros Bryennios who was honoured with the ancient, if somewhat demoted, title of Caesar - he served the Komnenoi as a general and envoy until his death in the 1130s. Bryennios himself was a historian and his surviving work of four books, available to the West in French, was a key influence on his wife's work. So much so, that it's said the cause of her writing the *Alexiad* may have been prompted by Bryennios not having finished it before his death. The resources available to the princess were certainly vast, and another huge asset of the text is Anna's habit of incorporating official texts in their entirety. The Treaty of Diabolis, which swore the defeated Bohemond to her father's service, outlines the towns he was to govern and is a rich source of information for the administration of the empire and the routes of governance. Bryennios offers no such detail and the difference between the married couple's styles is vast. Where her husband records the aristocratic family crises that ultimately brought Alexios to power, Anna's narrative and use of literary genre, backed up by eyewitness accounts and imperial bureaucracy, is nearly unparalleled in the Byzantine period. The heart of the *Alexiad* might be how the Komnenoi wished to remember Alexios in the 1140s, after decades of rivalry between Crusader states and Constantinople, but its use for historians today is due to the detail through which the author expertly conducted her research and, where Anna omits something, other sources can tell us what Byzantium's elite might have wanted to conceal.

Byzantium had known female rulers before, but it had never known a woman so well educated and with such resources of time and societal position. Her work is a witness and record of Byzantine society as it recognised the growth of the West. Plus, the fact that it is set against an epic narrative of protagonist and antagonist gives the *Alexiad* a timeless quality. Anna did not become empress, but she did carve out her own legacy, and it is unlikely she spent half her life in captivity. Reconciled with her brother John, the succeeding emperor commissioned his court poet to write something for her childrens' weddings to foreign royalty. It came with a certain degree of irony:

> ***"And you [Anna], who I do not even know how to address properly. You most divine porphyrogénnētē, rejoice, and with my lord, the learned Caesar, rejoice again. For behold, your wish is granted and your desire is realised. You saw your sons happily leading home brides, receiving crowns, being cheered by the senate, the people and the clergy, escorted to the wedding ceremony by their uncle and emperor who was yesterday escorted by songs of victory."***

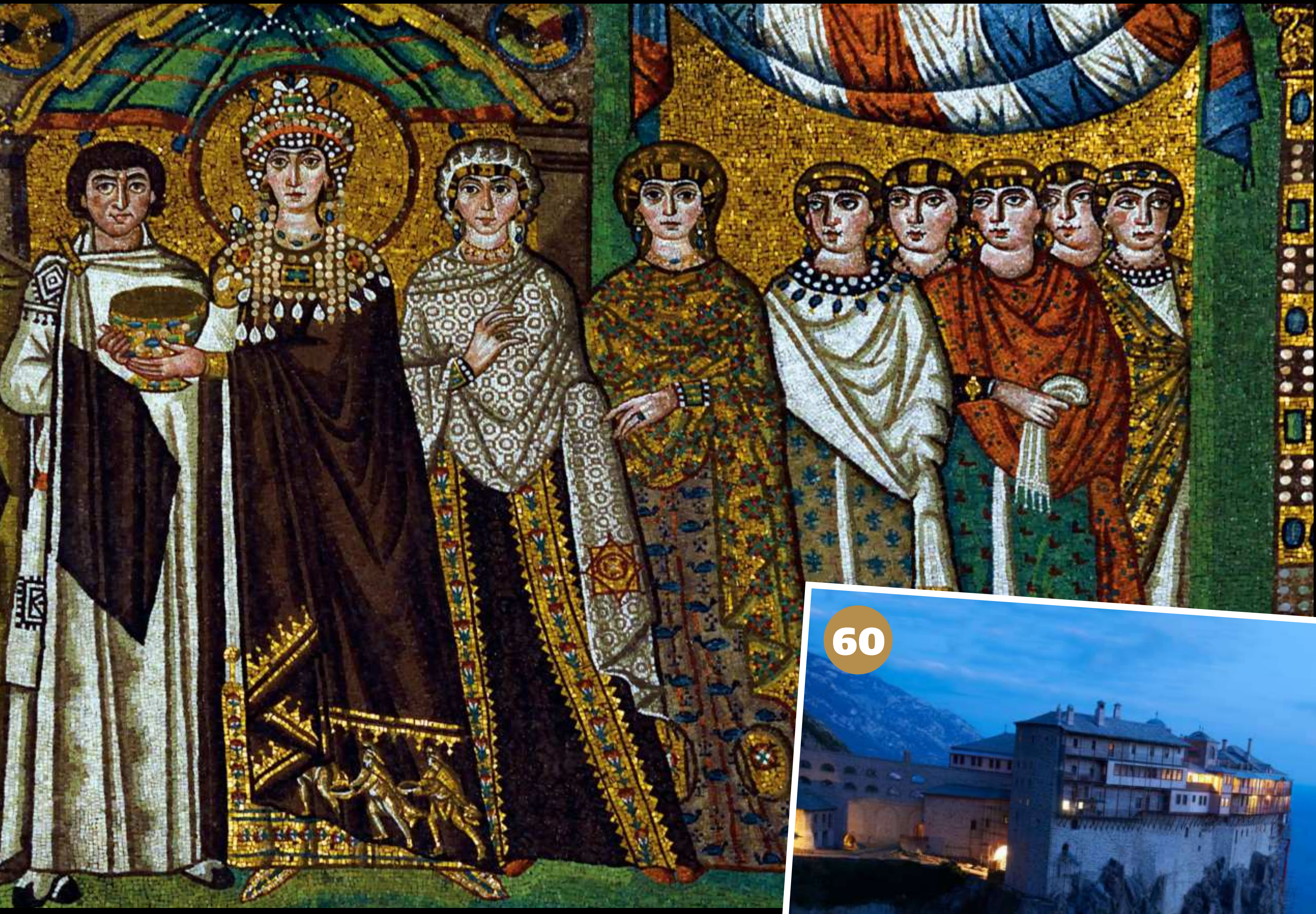
RELIGION

50 RELIGION OF NEW ROME
How Christianity defined and divided the Byzantine Empire

52 THE EMPIRE'S FINEST ART
Take a close look at Basilica San Vitale's most beautiful mosaics

54 THE GREAT SCHISM
The religious schism of 1054 was the longest and bloodiest disagreement in Church history

60 MOUNT ATHOS
The holy peninsula where the flame of Byzantine monastic life still burns



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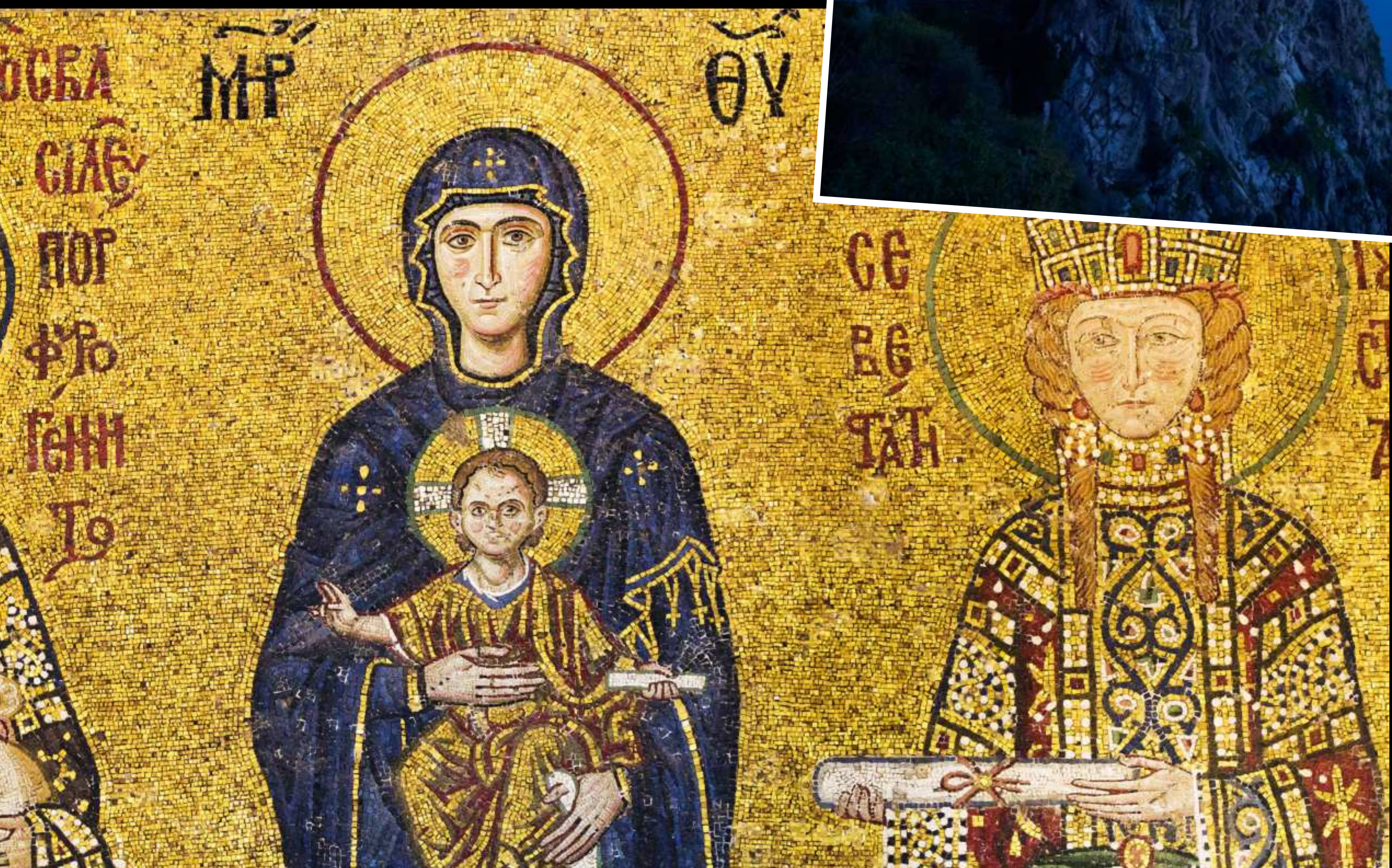

THE RELIGION OF NEW ROME

How Christianity defined and divided the Byzantine Empire

Written by Edoardo Albert

Language. That was the first, the most enduring and the most defining difference between the Christianity of the Eastern and Western halves of the Roman Empire. The west spoke Latin; the east, Greek. The peoples of the two halves of the Empire spoke in their respective languages, they worshipped in them, they thought and argued and they prayed in them, with all the differences in world view and imagination that comes from two different languages. Indeed, so long-lasting were these differences that many villages in southern Italy that were reconquered by the Byzantines under their greatest emperor, Justinian, remained Greek-speaking right through until the 20th century, enclaves of Byzantine culture in the heart of the Latin west.

In the first centuries CE this was not too great a problem, as most people could speak both Latin and Greek, but by the lifetime of St Augustine - the most influential of the Church Fathers in the Latin-speaking west - the linguistic divide was growing into a gulf. Augustine himself never mastered Greek. With the foundation of Constantinople as the capital of the Eastern Empire the linguistic split became broader and deeper. The gulf was widened after the deposition of Romulus Augustulus, the last Western Emperor, in 476, when Constantinople became the seat of the only living ruler of the Romans, even if by this time the emperor and most of his subjects spoke Greek.

> With the foundation of Constantinople as the capital of the Eastern Empire, the linguistic split became broader

Constantine founded his city, Constantinople, as a self-consciously Christian capital for the recently baptised empire: it was a city untainted by the pagan past of Rome. But as the seat of the emperor, Constantinople required a bishop who matched the emperor in dignity. The most ancient and authoritative bishoprics of the Christian church were Rome, Antioch and Alexandria. Jerusalem had a place of honour for its importance as the place of Jesus' Passion and Resurrection, but the city itself had been devastated in the Jewish Wars of the second century. However, with the emperor's move to Constantinople, the bishop of Constantinople, called a patriarch in common with the patriarchs of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem, came to be considered second in authority after the bishop of Rome. For the Greek-speaking church the five patriarchates were equal in dignity, with the bishop of Rome the first among equals. This was particularly the view of the patriarch of Constantinople - but it was not necessarily the view of the bishops of Rome. The Byzantine Orthodox church was and is organized as largely autonomous national churches, praying and worshipping in their native language.

The Islamic conquests of the seventh century saw three of the five patriarchates - Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem - fall under Muslim rule. That left Rome and Constantinople. The emperor, who appointed the patriarch of Constantinople, thought that his bishop should have primacy in the spiritual realm, as he had primacy in the temporal realm. This difference lead eventually to the Great Schism of 1054.

But the Schism would not have endured if not for the slowly accumulating cultural and religious differences between Greek and Latin churches. In these early centuries the churches looked much the same, inside or out, whatever the liturgical language, but points of difference included the use of leavened or unleavened bread - leavened in the east, unleavened in the west - and the great iconoclastic controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries. The eastern church was riven by a profound dispute as to whether icons and paintings broke the commandment in the Decalogue against images. Although icons were eventually restored, the controversy, which never affected the western church, deepened the rift between east and west. While churches of the first millennium showed relatively little difference between east and west, from the high Middle Ages onwards western

Mount Athos remains the spiritual heart of Orthodox Christianity to this day

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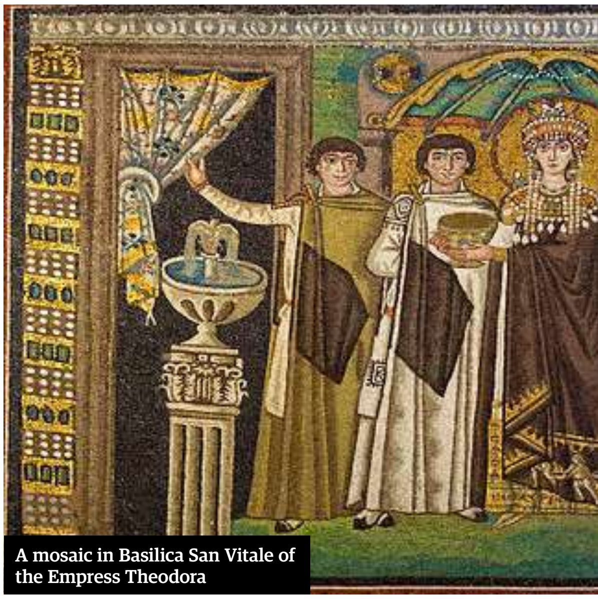

A mosaic in Basilica San Vitale of the Empress Theodora

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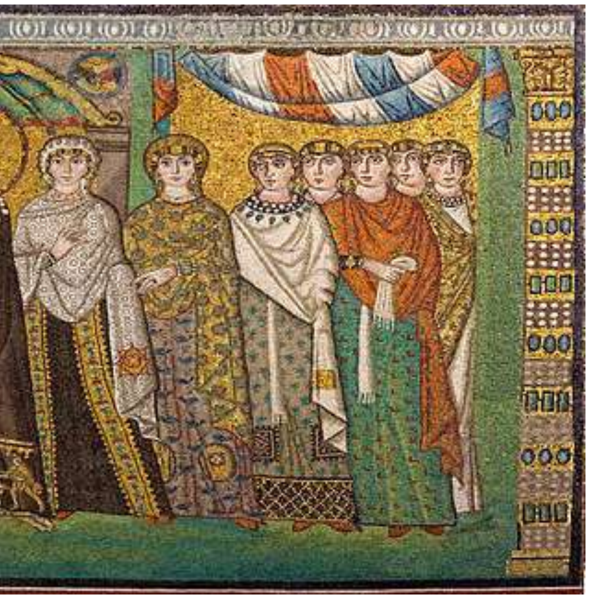


“The adoption of Renaissance and Baroque styles in the west lead to profoundly different religious imagery between the churches”

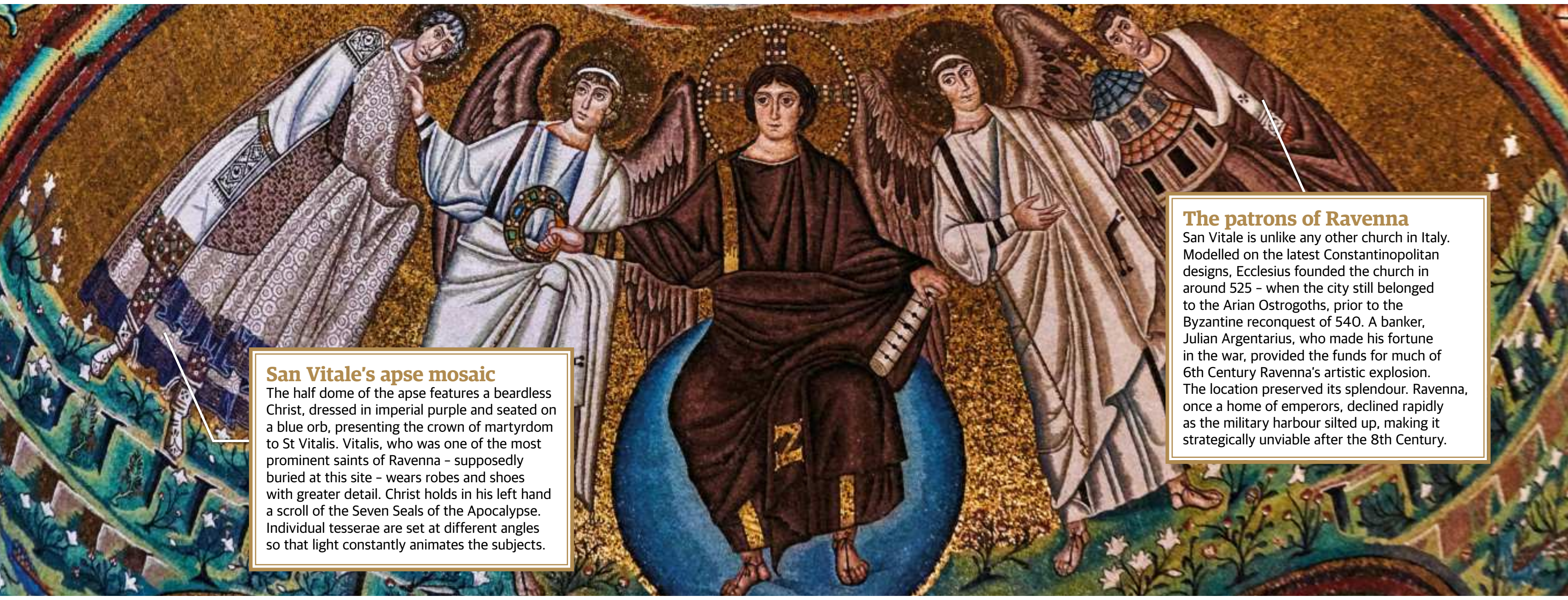
religious artists were creating works of greater naturalism as compared to the iconography of the east. The adoption of Renaissance and Baroque styles in the west lead to profoundly different religious imagery between the churches. Entering an Orthodox church today, with the almost overwhelming spiritual presence of its iconography, is to be transported through time to the almost continuous expression of Orthodox worship.

Monasticism was and remains the central expression of the spiritual life in the eastern church. Unlike in the west, where various rules were promulgated, eastern monks all follow the rule devised by St Basil the Great. The great monasteries, chief among these being the many monasteries on Mount Athos, acquired great religious authority within the eastern church, reacting against heresies, and occasionally fomenting them, and providing the deep spiritual well that allowed the Orthodox Church to survive when its capital, Constantinople, was conquered by the Muslim Turks in 1453.

THE EMPIRE'S FINEST ART

Take a closer look at Basilica San Vitale's most beautiful mosaics

Written by Nathan Websdale

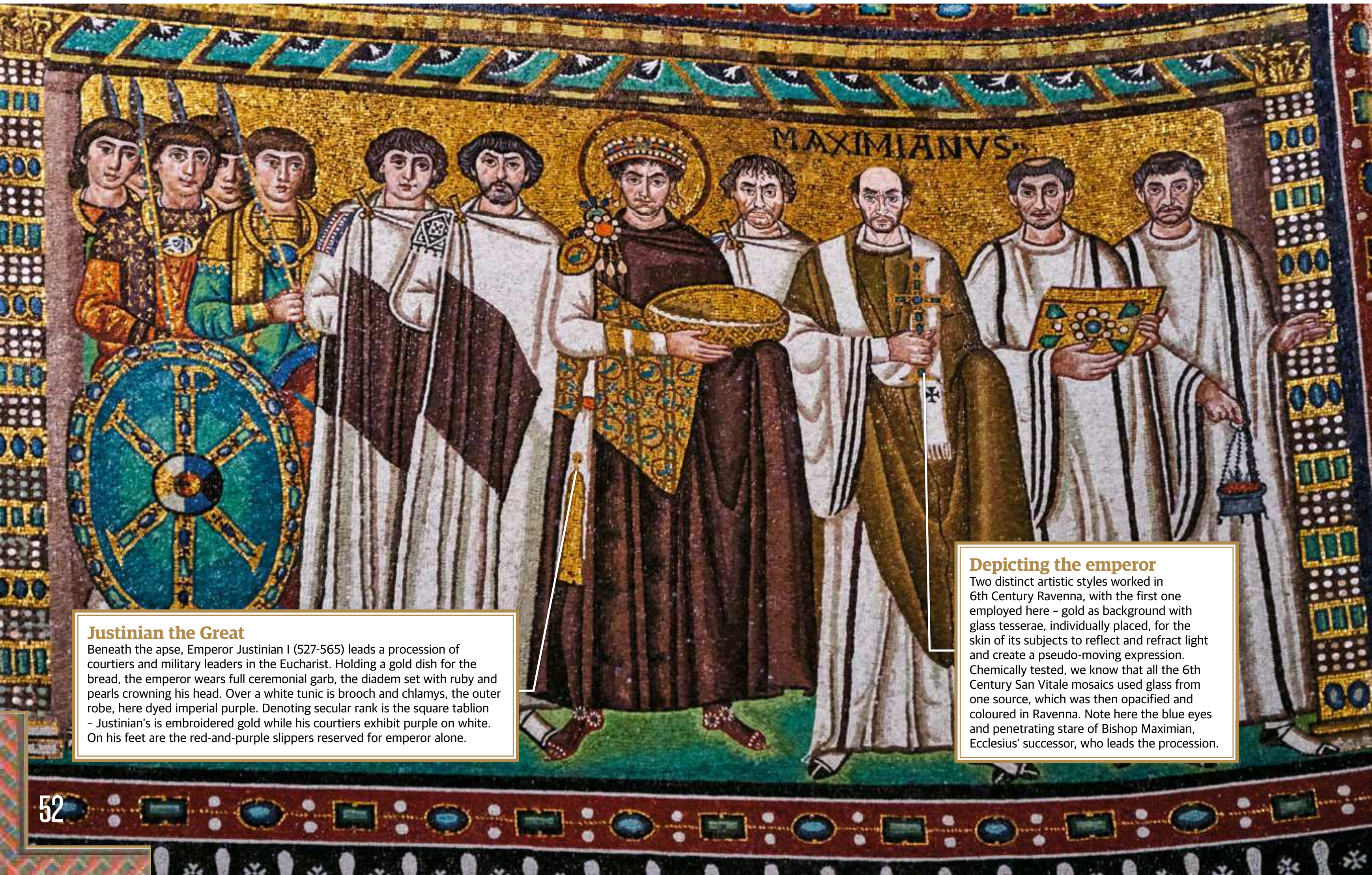


San Vitale's apse mosaic

The half dome of the apse features a beardless Christ, dressed in imperial purple and seated on a blue orb, presenting the crown of martyrdom to St Vitalis. Vitalis, who was one of the most prominent saints of Ravenna – supposedly buried at this site – wears robes and shoes with greater detail. Christ holds in his left hand a scroll of the Seven Seals of the Apocalypse. Individual tesserae are set at different angles so that light constantly animates the subjects.

The patrons of Ravenna

San Vitale is unlike any other church in Italy. Modelled on the latest Constantinopolitan designs, Ecclesius founded the church in around 525 – when the city still belonged to the Arian Ostrogoths, prior to the Byzantine reconquest of 540. A banker, Julian Argentarius, who made his fortune in the war, provided the funds for much of 6th Century Ravenna's artistic explosion. The location preserved its splendour. Ravenna, once a home of emperors, declined rapidly as the military harbour silted up, making it strategically unviable after the 8th Century.

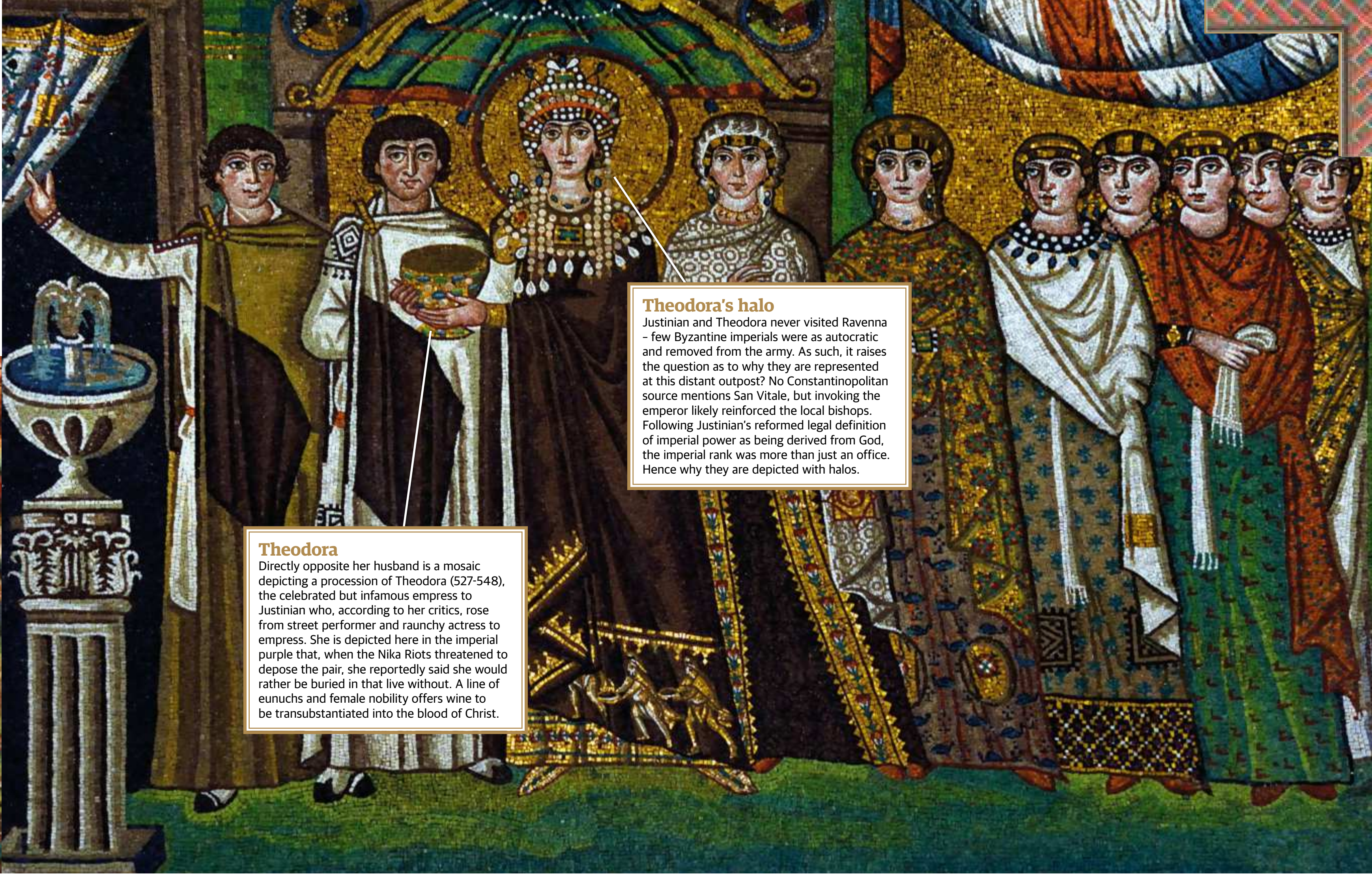


Justinian the Great

Beneath the apse, Emperor Justinian I (527-565) leads a procession of courtiers and military leaders in the Eucharist. Holding a gold dish for the bread, the emperor wears full ceremonial garb, the diadem set with ruby and pearls crowning his head. Over a white tunic is brooch and chlamys, the outer robe, here dyed imperial purple. Denoting secular rank is the square tablion – Justinian's is embroidered gold while his courtiers exhibit purple on white. On his feet are the red-and-purple slippers reserved for emperor alone.

Depicting the emperor

Two distinct artistic styles worked in 6th Century Ravenna, with the first one employed here – gold as background with glass tesserae, individually placed, for the skin of its subjects to reflect and refract light and create a pseudo-moving expression. Chemically tested, we know that all the 6th Century San Vitale mosaics used glass from one source, which was then opacified and coloured in Ravenna. Note here the blue eyes and penetrating stare of Bishop Maximian, Ecclesius' successor, who leads the procession.



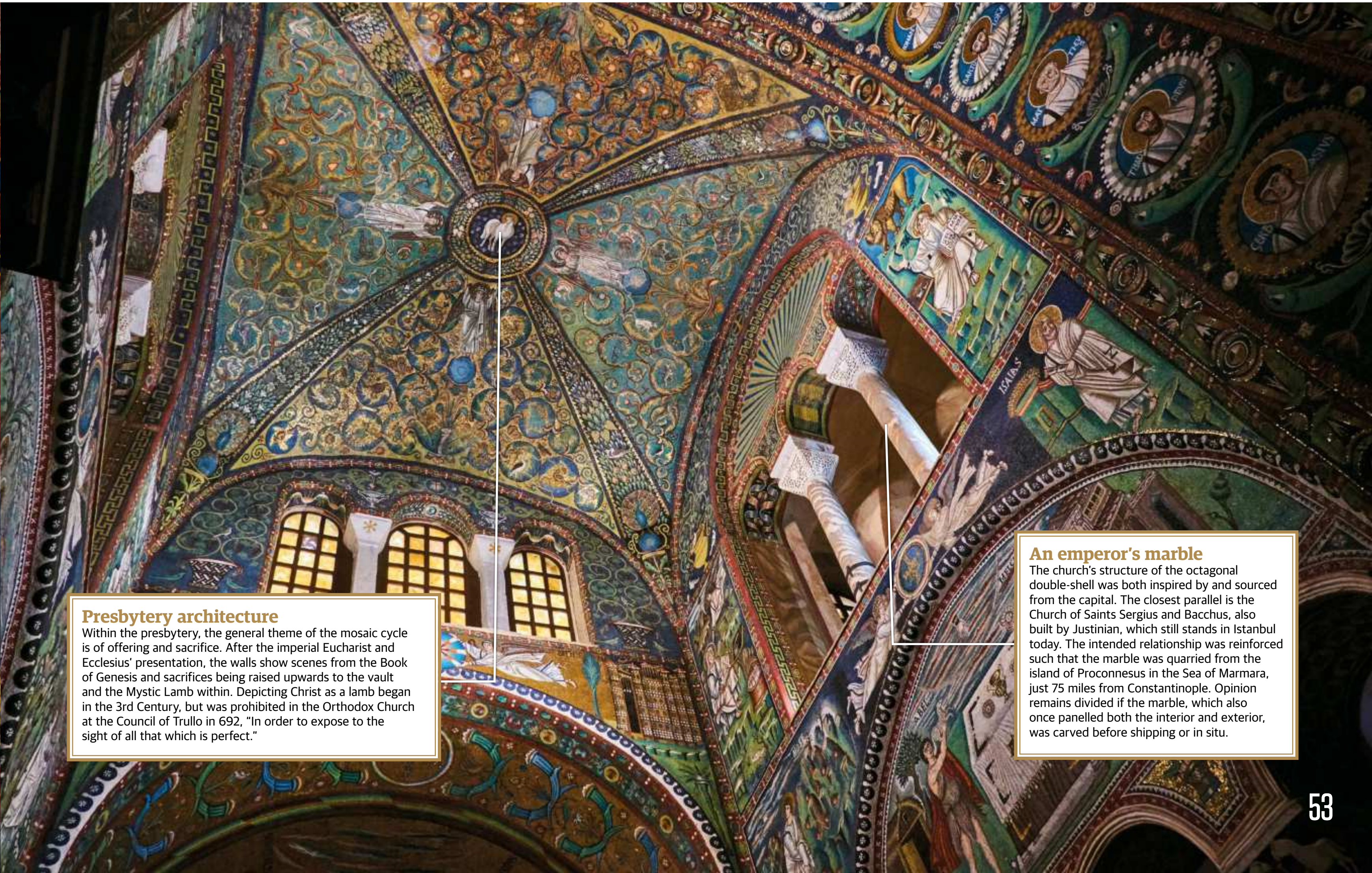
Theodora's halo

Justinian and Theodora never visited Ravenna – few Byzantine imperials were as autocratic and removed from the army. As such, it raises the question as to why they are represented at this distant outpost? No Constantinopolitan source mentions San Vitale, but invoking the emperor likely reinforced the local bishops. Following Justinian's reformed legal definition of imperial power as being derived from God, the imperial rank was more than just an office. Hence why they are depicted with halos.

Theodora

Directly opposite her husband is a mosaic depicting a procession of Theodora (527-548), the celebrated but infamous empress to Justinian who, according to her critics, rose from street performer and raunchy actress to empress. She is depicted here in the imperial purple that, when the Nika Riots threatened to depose the pair, she reportedly said she would rather be buried in that live without. A line of eunuchs and female nobility offers wine to be transubstantiated into the blood of Christ.

All images © Alamy



Presbytery architecture

Within the presbytery, the general theme of the mosaic cycle is of offering and sacrifice. After the imperial Eucharist and Ecclesius' presentation, the walls show scenes from the Book of Genesis and sacrifices being raised upwards to the vault and the Mystic Lamb within. Depicting Christ as a lamb began in the 3rd Century, but was prohibited in the Orthodox Church at the Council of Trullo in 692, "In order to expose to the sight of all that which is perfect."

An emperor's marble

The church's structure of the octagonal double-shell was both inspired by and sourced from the capital. The closest parallel is the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, also built by Justinian, which still stands in Istanbul today. The intended relationship was reinforced such that the marble was quarried from the island of Proconnesus in the Sea of Marmara, just 75 miles from Constantinople. Opinion remains divided if the marble, which also once panelled both the interior and exterior, was carved before shipping or in situ.

THE GREAT SCHISM

There are more than 40 different Christian denominations today, but the schism of 1054 was the longest and bloodiest disagreement in Church history

Written by David Crookes

At the start of the 11th century, Christianity was everywhere, with 50 million souls under a single religion. Just a few decades later it had torn itself in half, apparently over trivial disagreements. How did an entire religion become so divided over such tiny details?

Schisms, or splits, in the Church were nothing new. There was a mini schism from 343 to 398, when followers of Bishop Arius began preaching that Jesus had not existed before he was created by God the Father. This made Jesus effectively subordinate to God and was declared heretical at the First Council of Nicea in 325. But Arianism remained popular for a while and Emperor Constantine I was baptised by an Arian bishop. Then in 404 there was another split, when the Byzantine emperor Arcadius banished John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, for criticising the emperor's wife. This rift was patched up in 415 (albeit eight years after Chrysostom's death), but temporary splits between the Eastern and Western Church occurred quite regularly. Each time they would find a way to reconcile the two sides, but in the five centuries leading up to the Great Schism of 1054, the Church had been in schism for a total of 231 years!

> The Latin 'cathedra' means 'chair'. When the pope speaks 'ex cathedra', he speaks 'from his chair', i.e. officially

The fundamental source of all the disagreements can be traced to the breakup of the Roman Empire. In 285 the Empire had become too big to control from a single capital, so Emperor Diocletian divided it into two halves. The Eastern half was controlled from the city of Byzantium, which later became Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul). The Western Empire kept Rome as its capital, but didn't last long. Germanic and Frankish tribes took over Western Europe and by 476, Odoacer had conquered Italy, and the Western Roman Empire was over.

The Church, meanwhile, had organised itself under a series of patriarchs. These were like super-archbishops, and there were five of them: Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Constantinople and Rome. The patriarchs were theoretically equal to each other, but in practice the patriarchs of Constantinople and Rome had more influence because their seats were the capitals of the Eastern and Western Empires, respectively. By a quirk of geography, the patriarch of Rome was also the *only* patriarch in the western half and when the Western Empire fell, the patriarch of Rome - or pope, as he came to be known - was in charge of churches that lay outside of the territory of the Eastern emperor, even though he was still theoretically answerable to that emperor.

This arrangement pleased neither party. Until the 8th century, the seal of approval from the Eastern emperor was required before a new patriarch could be appointed. This was mostly a rubber stamping exercise, but by the 6th century the papacy became increasingly uncomfortable with accepting this interference from the Eastern emperor. To get around this, the Western Church looked for a secular leader of its own, and on Christmas Day 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne Holy Roman emperor. This move effectively removed the pope from the authority of Empress Irene of Constantinople. The pope was increasingly acting as if he had greater authority than the other patriarchs.

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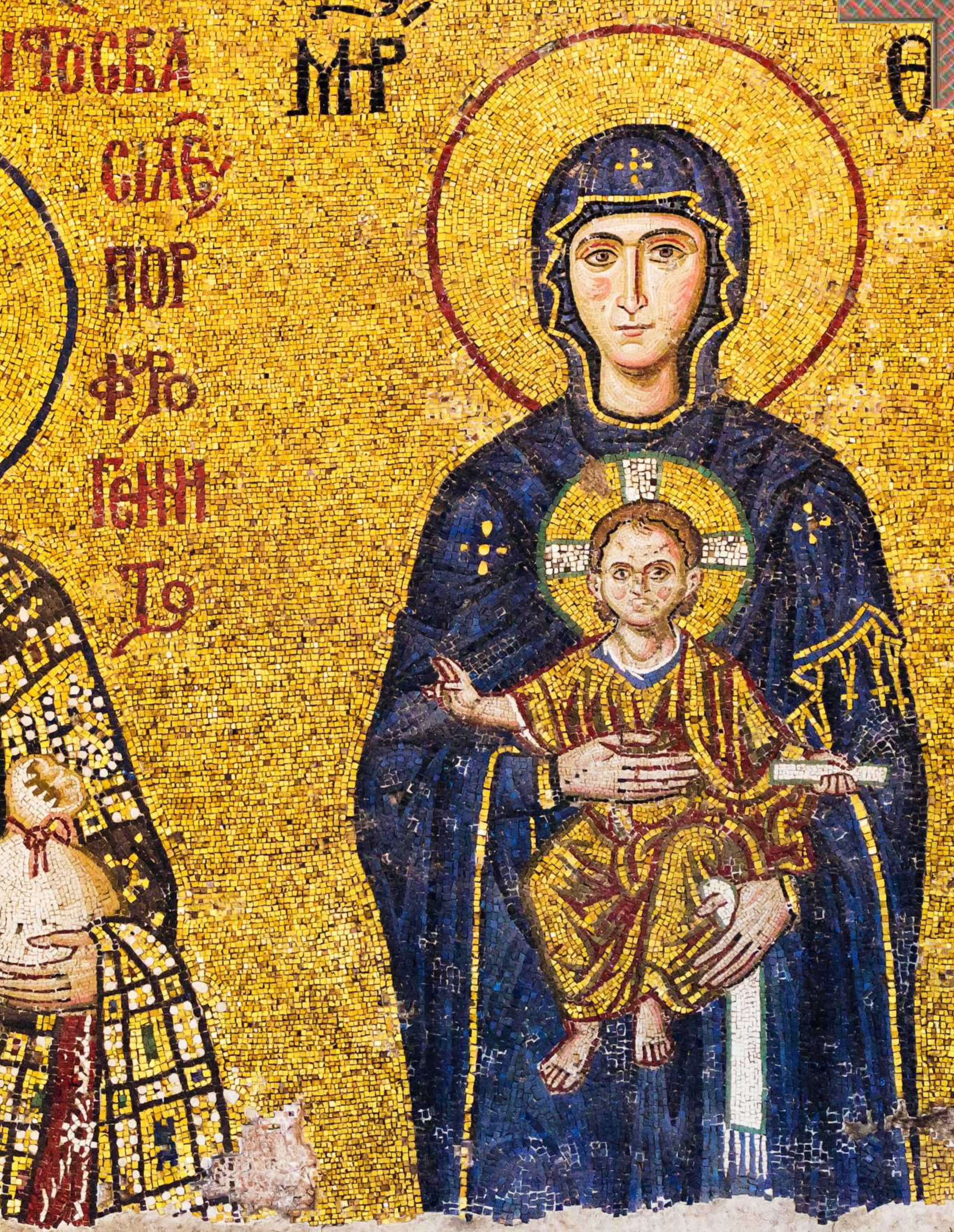
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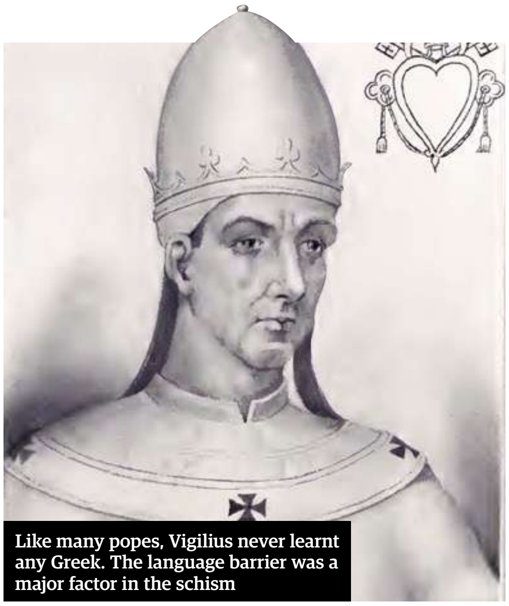


Like many popes, Vigilius never learnt any Greek. The language barrier was a major factor in the schism

Another problem was language. The Eastern Empire still used Greek for international diplomacy and for religious services. But in the West, almost no one spoke it any more. They used the Latin language of the old Western Roman Empire, which was understood by almost no one in the East. The language difference created a cultural isolation that allowed subtle differences in religious ceremonies to go unnoticed. Over time the Greek and Latin services drifted apart and these minor details eventually grew into major doctrinal sticking points.

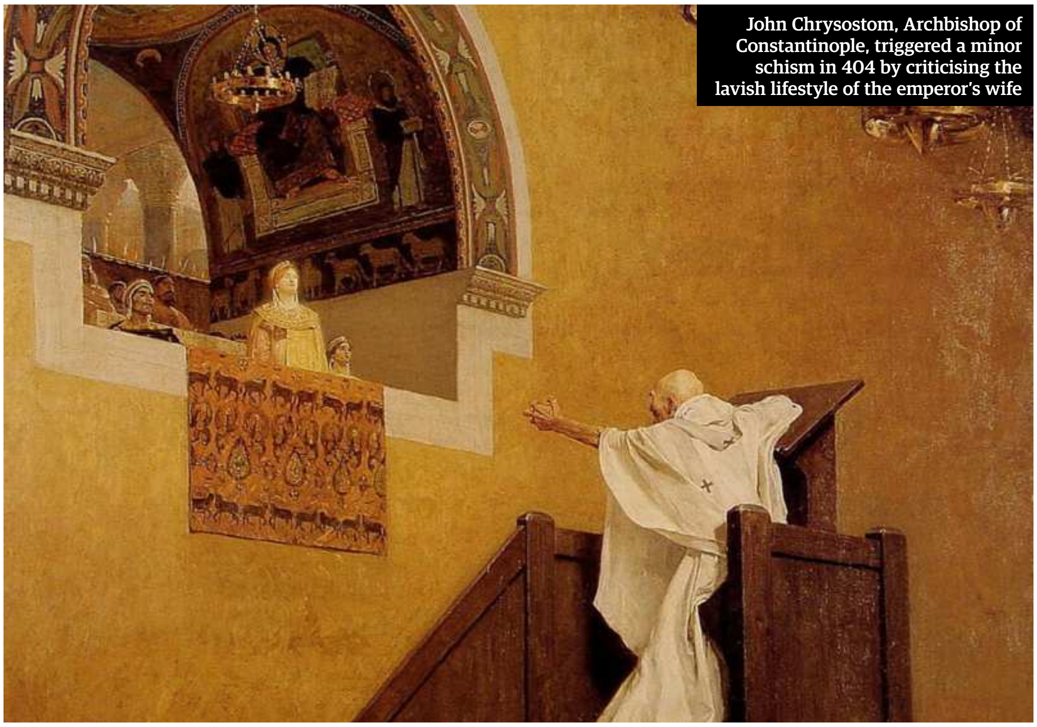
The Nicene Creed is an important example of this. The text of this declaration of Christian faith was agreed at the Council of Nicea in 325, then amended slightly at the Council of Constantinople 56 years later. The idea of God existing as Father, Son and Holy Spirit had been around for 200 years, but at Nicea, the Church Fathers attempted to specify the nature of this. The Nicene Creed states that the Holy Ghost "proceeds from the Father". In other words, that God the Father is the source of the Holy Spirit, which by implication means that God the Son (Jesus) is not. In the West, there were concerns that this could be interpreted to mean that the Father is the only true God and that Jesus is somehow less divine than God, or even not really divine at all. This was worryingly close to the Arian heresy of 343. To get around this, in 589, the Western Church tweaked the Creed to say that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. This ideology is known as Double Procession, because the Holy Ghost proceeds from both Father and Son, equally. The phrase 'and the Son' in Latin is 'filioque' and this change to the Creed is known as the filioque clause.

Because the amended text was in Latin and was only used in Western churches, the Eastern Church didn't really notice the change until the 7th century. Patriarch Paul II of Constantinople accused Pope Theodore I of breaking a rule from 431, which stated that the Nicene Creed would never be changed or added to. Pope Theodore responded by excommunicating Paul II. This began a series of tit-for-tat condemnations. As soon as he took office, Theodore's successor, Pope Martin I, accused the Eastern Church of a different heresy (that Jesus Christ has just a single will, rather than a human will and a divine one). For this, the patriarch of Constantinople had him kidnapped, tortured and exiled.

There were several attempts by various members of the Church on both sides to patch up this rift. The disagreement was blamed on subtle mistranslations between the Greek and Latin versions of the Creed, and it was argued that the change was intended as a minor clarification, rather than a revision and so wasn't breaking the rules. But when Charlemagne became Holy Roman Emperor in 800, the Franks were the most insistent voices in favour of the filioque because they were looking for excuses to accuse the Eastern Church of heresy. The filioque became such a hot potato that the Creed wasn't said at all in Latin mass from 795 to 1014.

In the 1040s, the Normans began conquering southern Italy, which had been under Byzantine rule. The Normans replaced the Eastern bishops with Western ones of their own, and church

> For the first few centuries after Constantine, anyone living in the Byzantine world would still have called themselves Roman



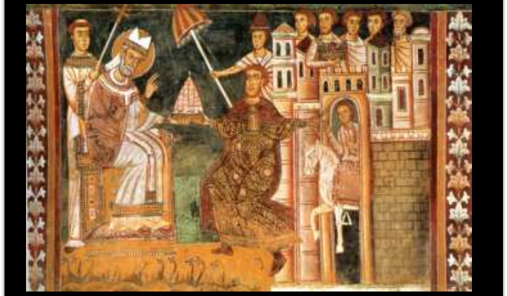
John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, triggered a minor schism in 404 by criticising the lavish lifestyle of the emperor's wife

© Alamy

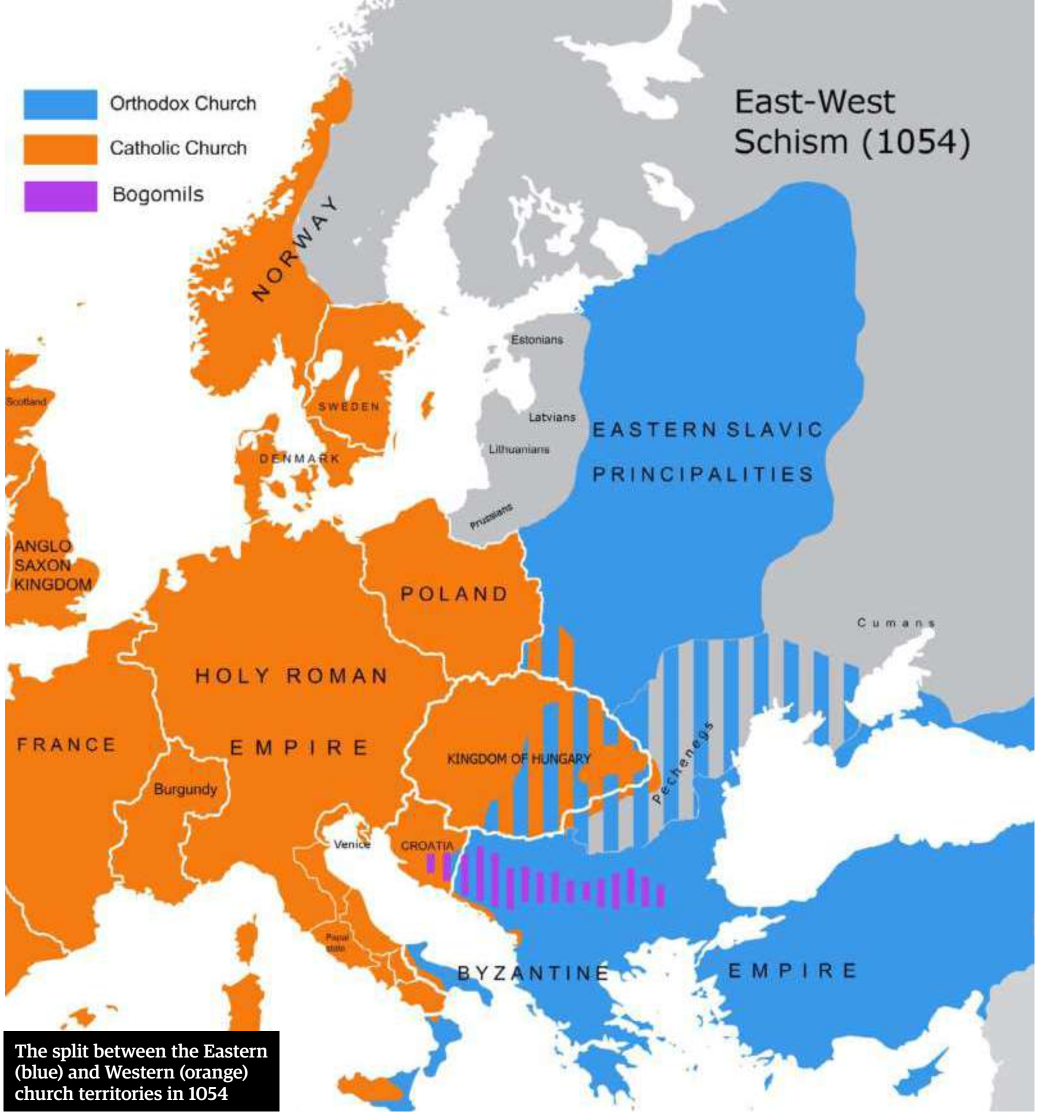
The forgery that split the Church

When Pope Leo IX claimed supreme authority over all Christian churches in 1053, he justified it with a manuscript called *The Donation of Constantine*. This was a decree from Emperor Constantine I in the 4th century that granted the Pope of Rome supremacy over "Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople, as also over all the churches of God in the whole earth". This authority, in addition to significant landed estates in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, was supposedly in gratitude to Pope Sylvester I, who cured Constantine of leprosy. There was just one, teeny tiny problem: the manuscript was a fake. It was written in the 8th century for Pope Stephen II to strengthen his negotiations with Pepin the Short, who was the father of Charlemagne.

In the mid 15th century, scholars began to suspect the forgery and it was finally conclusively demonstrated by the Catholic priest Lorenzo Valla. He conducted an exhaustive study of the language used in the text and showed that it contained words and idioms that weren't used in any other 4th-century document. Valla considered that the anachronisms were so glaring, that the Church could not possibly have been ignorant of the deception. Modern scholars now think that Pope Leo IX probably did believe the authenticity of the document. And it is worth realising that Valla had his own conflict of interest, because he was employed by Alfonso V of Aragon, who was fighting a territorial dispute with the Papal States. The Catholic Church suppressed Valla's exposé for centuries, but eventually conceded the *Donation* was fake.

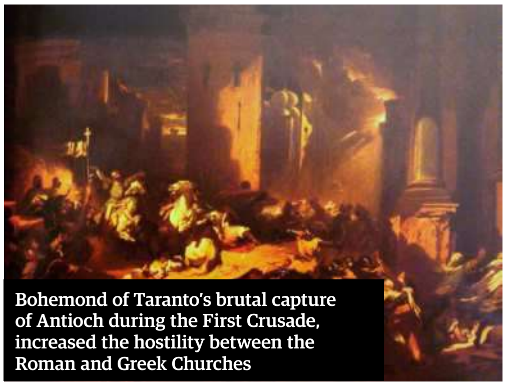


This 13th century fresco shows Emperor Constantine making the *Donation* to Pope Sylvester I

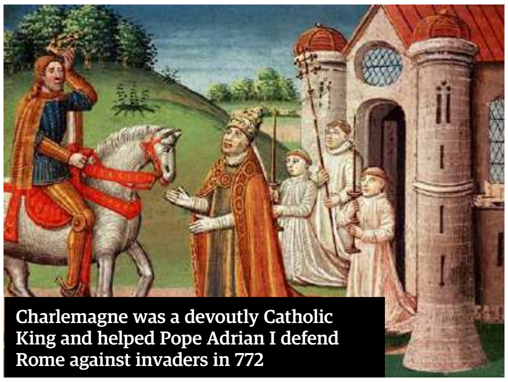


The split between the Eastern (blue) and Western (orange) church territories in 1054

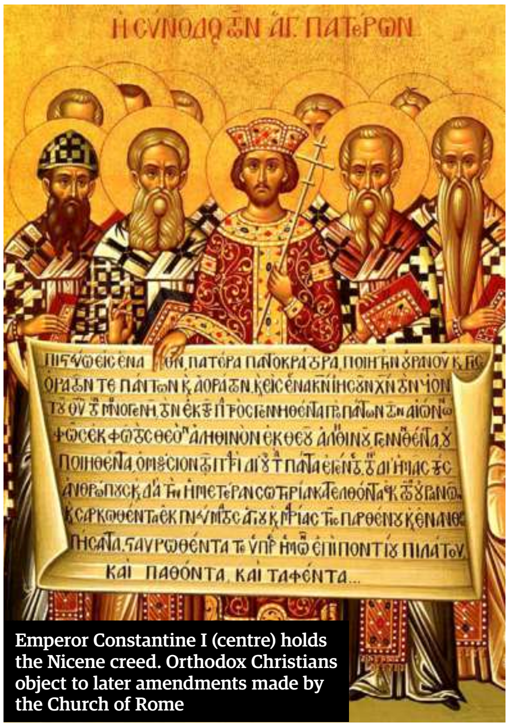
An interrupted church service at Hagia Sophia sparked an argument that has lasted almost a thousand years



Bohemond of Taranto's brutal capture of Antioch during the First Crusade, increased the hostility between the Roman and Greek Churches



Charlemagne was a devoutly Catholic King and helped Pope Adrian I defend Rome against invaders in 772


Η ϹΥΝΟΔΟϹ ΤΩΝ ΑΓ. ΠΑΤΕΡΩΝ

Emperor Constantine I (centre) holds the Nicene creed. Orthodox Christians object to later amendments made by the Church of Rome

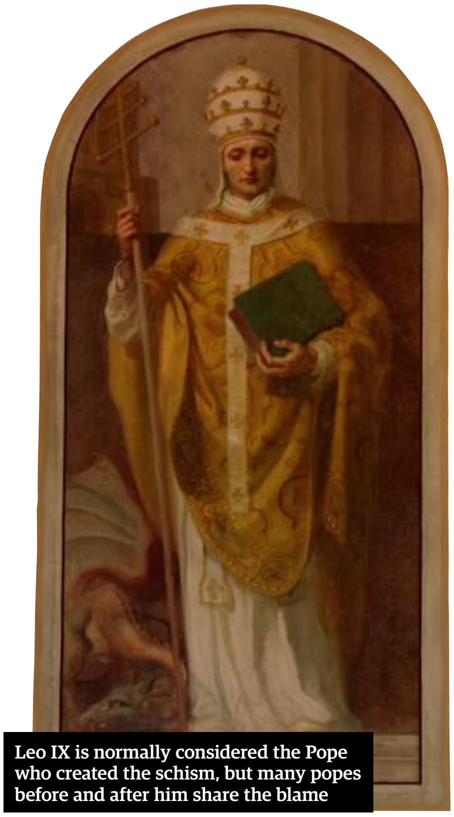
services abruptly changed from Greek to Latin. The liturgy, the proper fast days and even the kind of bread used for the Eucharist all changed, and the local populace were left bewildered. When they complained to the patriarch of Constantinople, who at this time was Michael Cerularius, he responded by closing all the Latin churches in Constantinople.

This just escalated the argument. In 1053, Patriarch Cerularius wrote an open letter, in Greek, to the Western bishop of Ampulia in southern Italy, condemning their Latin practices. Cardinal Humbert of Candida Silva, who was adviser to the pope on matters of the Eastern Church, got hold of a copy of this letter, translated it into Latin and showed it to Pope Leo IX. The pope responded by writing an enormous 41-chapter letter, arguing he was the successor of the apostle Peter and hence had supreme authority over all Christians and their bishops. Humbert was put in charge of a papal legation to deliver this fiery letter to Patriarch Cerularius in Constantinople, but he was also given a much friendlier and more moderate letter to give to the Eastern emperor Constantine IX, in the hope of winning his sympathy. When Humbert arrived in Constantinople in 1054, he was welcomed warmly by the emperor, but his initial meeting with the patriarch immediately turned into a shouting match and Humbert stormed out of the palace. Michael Cerularius refused to meet with them again after that and the legation was left to fume in Constantinople for several months.

On 16 July 1054, Humbert had had enough. The legation marched into the cathedral of Hagia Sophia, in the middle of the service of Divine Liturgy. Humbert slapped a papal bull (a decree from the pope) on the High Altar, excommunicating Michael Cerularius. The cathedral was in uproar and as the news spread, riots broke out. Humbert and his legates barely managed to escape and shortly thereafter, a Byzantine synod excommunicated them all.

This momentous event is normally seen as the start of the formal schism between East and West. But for all their drama, the mutual excommunications were just posturing. For one thing, while Humbert was kept waiting in Constantinople, Pope Leo IX had died. The authority of a papal legation doesn't automatically transfer from one pope to the next, and in any case, the next pope (Victor II) wasn't elected for another year. So Humbert's bull of excommunication wasn't valid. And even if it had been, Humbert was only excommunicating Michael Cerularius, not the office of patriarch of Constantinople itself. Likewise the return-fire excommunications of Humbert and the other legates didn't extend to the pope; there wasn't one!

> Today there are 250 million Orthodox Christians. They are the second largest Christian group, after Roman Catholicism

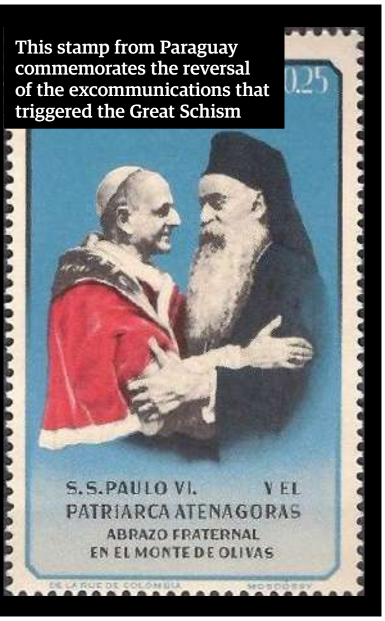


Leo IX is normally considered the Pope who created the schism, but many popes before and after him share the blame

Reconciliation hopes

In 1965, at the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI reversed the excommunications of 1054. Patriarch Athenagoras I did the same, at a simultaneous ceremony in Istanbul. This wasn't enough to end the schism but it did at least signal a desire to work towards reconciliation. There is already a group of churches in eastern Europe, called the Eastern Catholic Churches, that consider the schism healed. They began negotiations with the pope in the 13th century and were prepared to accept that the pope was the supreme head of the Church in return for concessions over the details of church traditions and services. Around 16 million Christians belong to the Eastern Catholic Churches – about 6% of all Orthodox Christians. Unsurprisingly though, these churches have been criticised from both sides of the East-West schism.

More recently, there has been a determined effort to find compromises. In 2004 at the Pallial mass in the Vatican, Pope Jean Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople said the Creed together. They said it in Greek and it didn't include the filioque. This was the first time this had happened in over a thousand years and there is now a tacit understanding that when East and West patriarchs are together, the filioque will be left out.



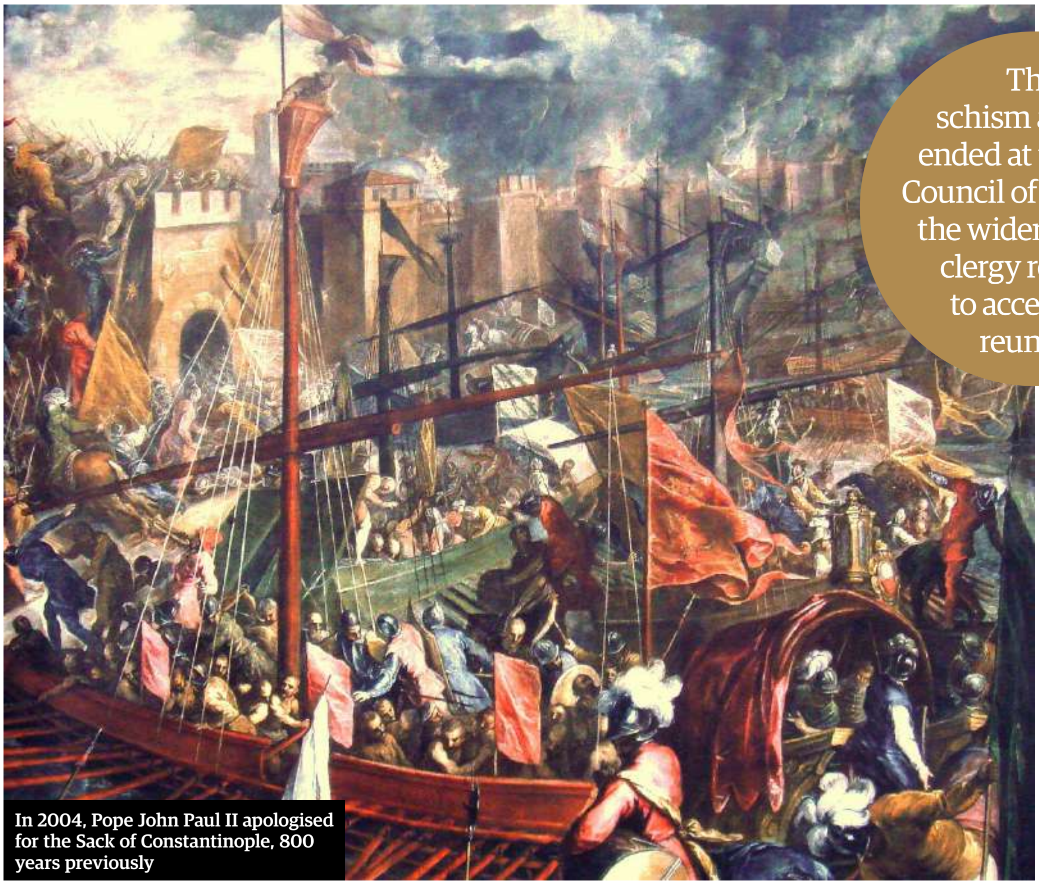
This stamp from Paraguay commemorates the reversal of the excommunications that triggered the Great Schism

This spat doesn't seem any more serious than any of the other minor schisms, and yet, somehow, it stuck. So what was different? In the aftermath of the debacle at Hagia Sophia, it seems to be a straightforward clash of egos. We know news of the pope's death had already reached Constantinople, because Michael Cerularius mentioned it in his rebuttal to the bull of excommunication, but he seems not to have realised it meant Humbert had no authority. This didn't matter, because Patriarch Cerularius had no intention of patching up the row. His Church and his office had been insulted and he demanded retribution.

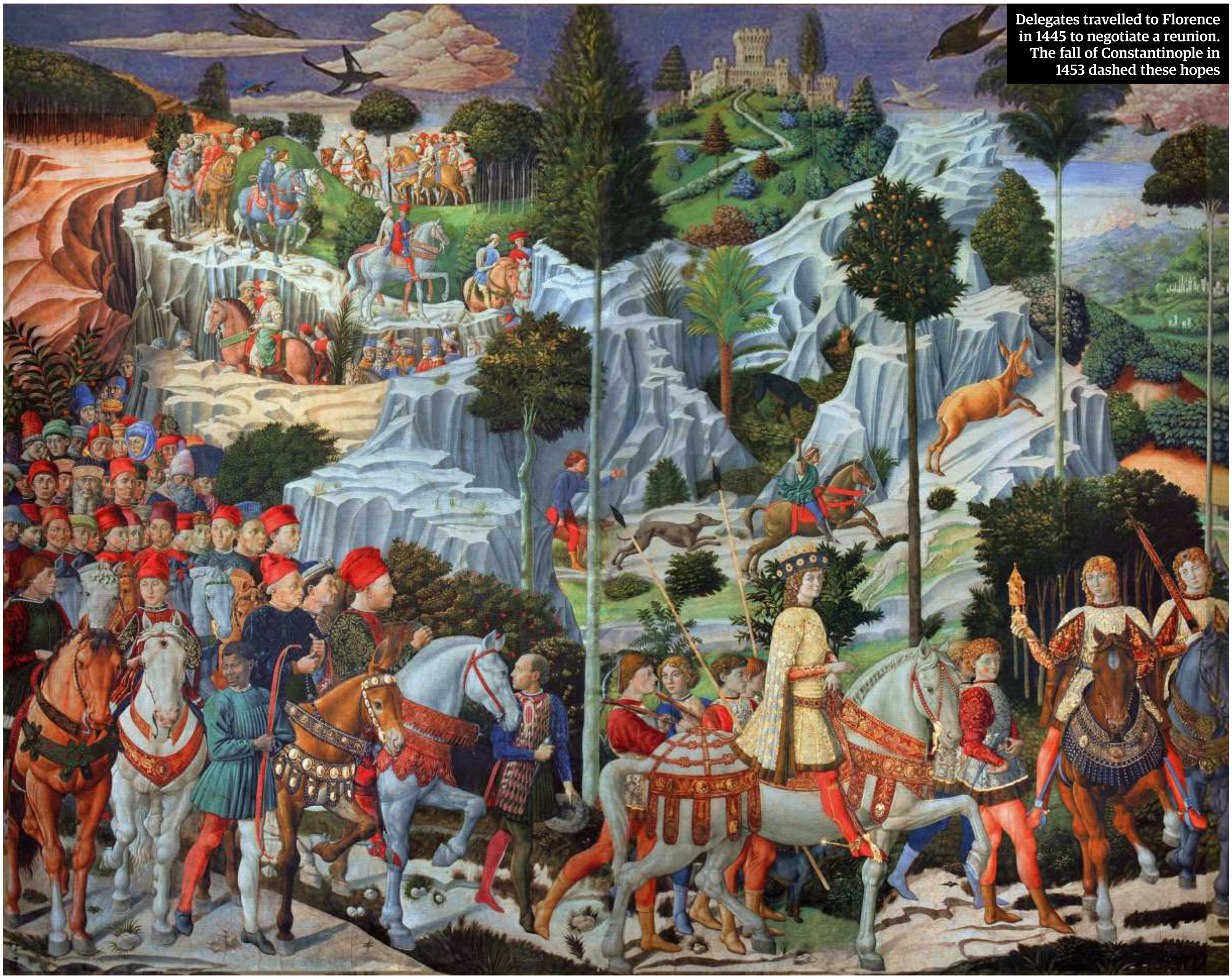
Unfortunately, Cerularius had less support from the other Eastern patriarchs than he expected. The patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem were both favourable to Rome and refused to join any attempts from Constantinople to whip up resentment against the West. This schism might have been quietly swept under the carpet after 50 years or so, like the others. But in 1095 Pope Urban II called for the first crusade against the Muslims in the Middle East. Ostensibly the purpose of this crusade was to restore Jerusalem to Christian rule, but in fact Pope Urban hoped to reunite the Christian Church – and place Rome at its head. The First Crusade did eventually recapture Jerusalem in 1099 (although Pope Urban died before news of the victory reached him). But far from reunifying the Church, it increased the rift between East and West. When the crusaders captured the city of Antioch, they massacred the Muslim inhabitants, but also many of the Byzantine Christians living there. The Eastern emperor Alexios failed to send troops to help the crusaders defend the city, because he had been told by Christian deserters that Antioch had already been recaptured. And then the leader of the crusading forces at Antioch, Bohemond of Taranto, used this supposed betrayal as justification to retain Antioch for himself, rather than return it to Byzantium, which was what had originally been agreed.

In short, the Great Schism was caused by misunderstanding and petty ambition, then perpetuated by more of the same. After Urban II, 12 successive popes failed to do anything to reunite the two sides and the cultural and ethnic differences between East and West continued to grow. In Constantinople, Greek and Latin communities lived together in an uneasy truce and in the 12th century, the Byzantine emperor Manuel I even married a Latin wife, Maria of Antioch. But when Manuel died in 1180, Maria took over as regent and immediately began favouring the Venetian merchants (who were Latin) living in Constantinople. After two years she was overthrown by the irate Greeks, and all 60,000 Latin inhabitants were massacred, sold as slaves or forced to flee. In 1185 it was the turn of the Byzantines when Norman knights invaded Greece and sacked the city of Thessalonica. More

The schism almost ended at the 1274 Council of Lyon, but the wider Eastern clergy refused to accept the reunion



In 2004, Pope John Paul II apologised for the Sack of Constantinople, 800 years previously



Delegates travelled to Florence in 1445 to negotiate a reunion. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 dashed these hopes

than 7,000 Greeks were killed, mostly civilians. Less than a decade later, the armies of the Fourth Crusade sacked Constantinople itself with even greater brutality. Over three days, thousands of civilians were killed, churches were looted, alters destroyed, nuns raped and artwork stolen.

Today, the differences between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches can seem bafflingly petty. The doctrinal differences between the Protestant and Catholic traditions are much wider, and yet these Churches have been more active in seeking common ground. But the doctrinal differences are just the lingering echoes of a much more fundamental estrangement. Even the terrible massacres at Thessalonica and Constantinople weren't the cause of the Great Schism, so much as a symptom of it. By adopting different languages and customs, the two sides allowed themselves to grow apart. But by worshipping the same God, they brought themselves into conflict.

When yeast meets West

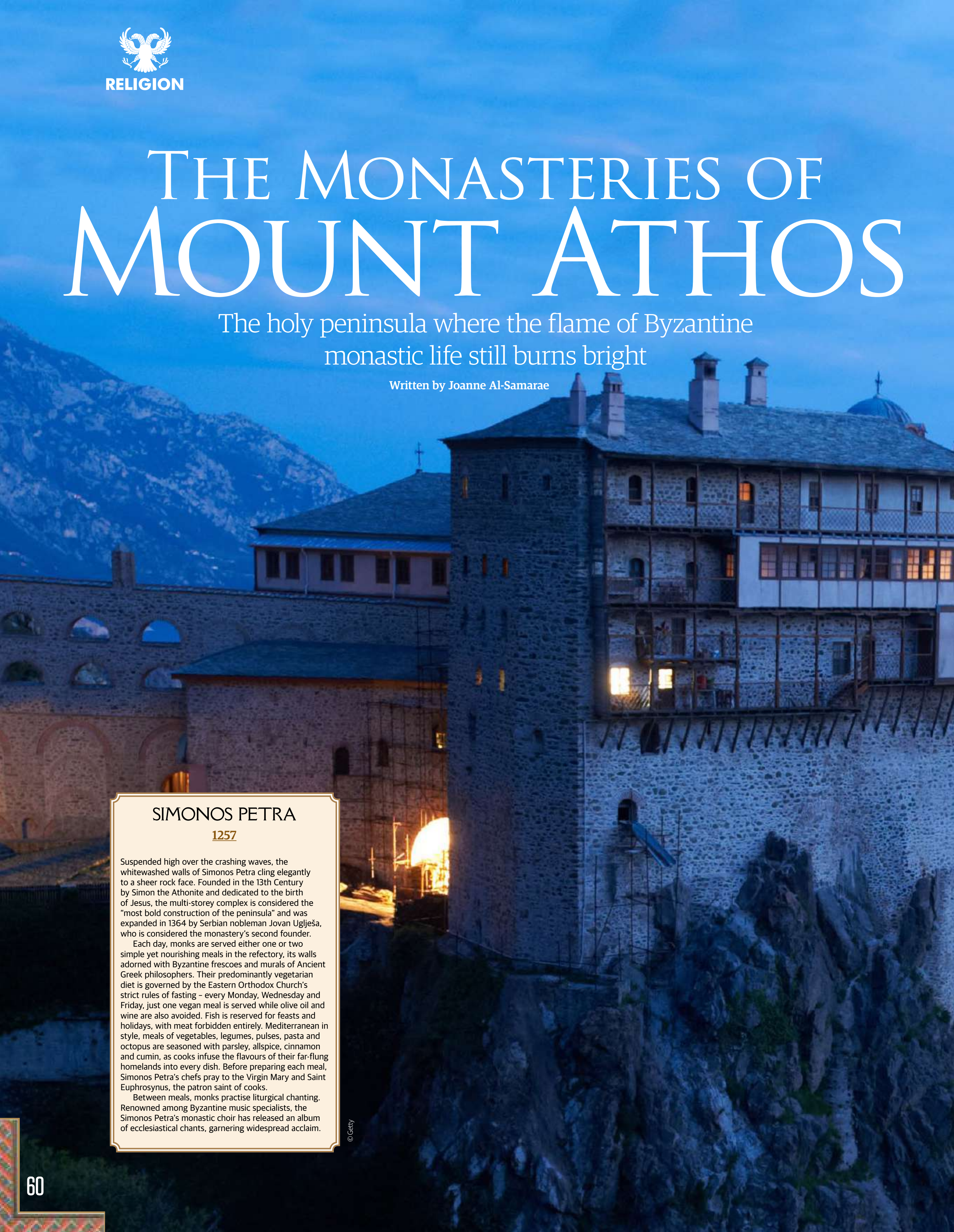
One of the points of contention between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches concerns the kind of bread used in the Eucharist ceremony. In the West, it became customary to use unleavened bread for communion, on the assumption that this was the kind of bread Jesus was most likely to have eaten at the Last Supper. The Orthodox view was that unleavened bread was associated with Judaism and so they opted for leavened bread in church services as a way of distancing themselves from Jewish practices. In the 11th century, this minor detail was used as wedge to divide the two Churches and various eloquent justifications were written to describe how the yeast represents the risen Christ. Catholics were referred to as 'azymites' (from the Greek words meaning 'without yeast') by the Orthodox Christians, while the Catholics responded by calling Eastern Christians 'fermentarians'. Patriarch Michael Cerularius claimed that the flour and water communion wafers used by the Franks weren't bread at all and could therefore only symbolise a soulless Christ. By the 15th century, the Orthodox Church had admitted that either kind of bread was acceptable but the custom has proved hard to shake and Eastern churches mostly still use leavened bread.

Bible scholars are divided about what was eaten at the Last Supper, but it probably wasn't communion wafers

THE MONASTERIES OF MOUNT ATHOS

The holy peninsula where the flame of Byzantine monastic life still burns bright

Written by Joanne Al-Samarae



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SIMONOS PETRA

1257

Suspended high over the crashing waves, the whitewashed walls of Simonos Petra cling elegantly to a sheer rock face. Founded in the 13th Century by Simon the Athonite and dedicated to the birth of Jesus, the multi-storey complex is considered the "most bold construction of the peninsula" and was expanded in 1364 by Serbian nobleman Jovan Uglješa, who is considered the monastery's second founder.

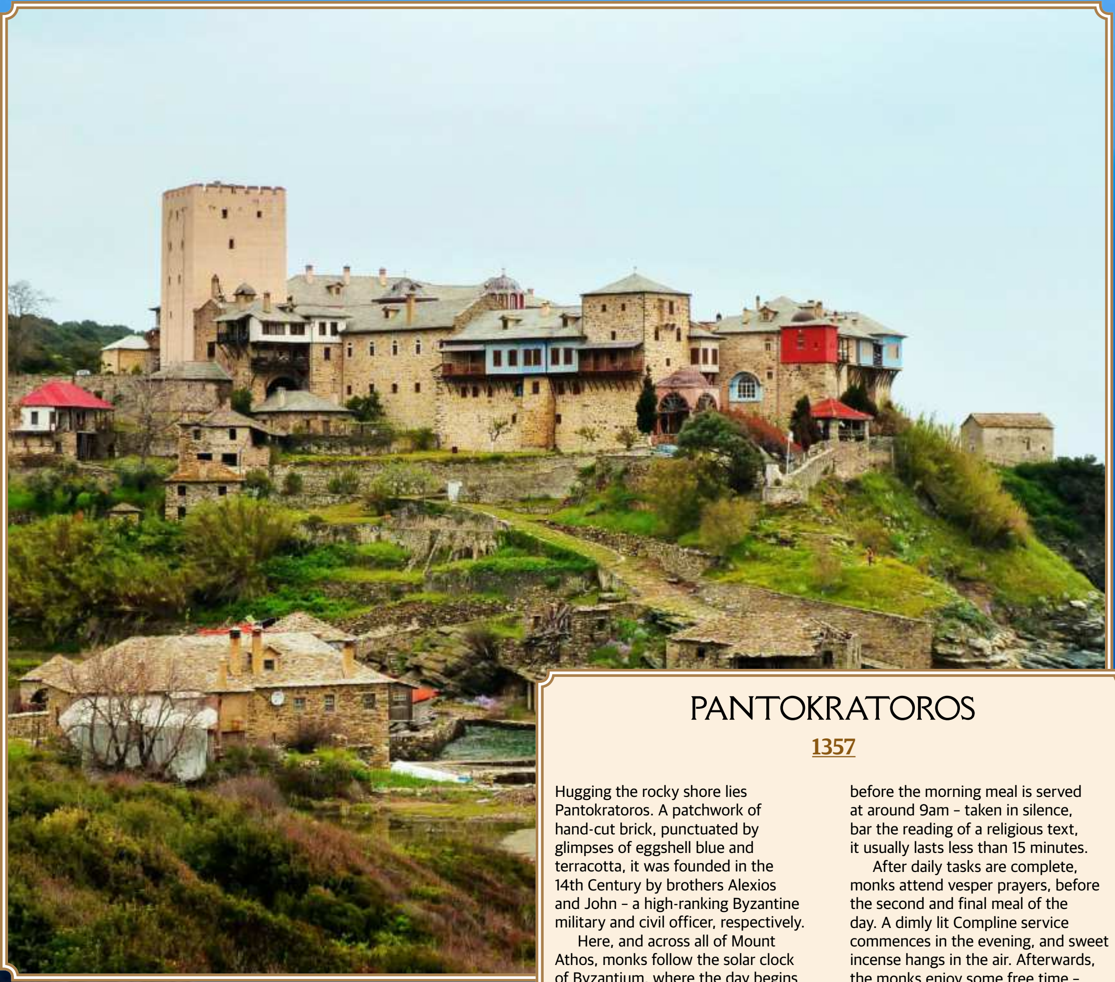
Each day, monks are served either one or two simple yet nourishing meals in the refectory, its walls adorned with Byzantine frescoes and murals of Ancient Greek philosophers. Their predominantly vegetarian diet is governed by the Eastern Orthodox Church's strict rules of fasting – every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, just one vegan meal is served while olive oil and wine are also avoided. Fish is reserved for feasts and holidays, with meat forbidden entirely. Mediterranean in style, meals of vegetables, legumes, pulses, pasta and octopus are seasoned with parsley, allspice, cinnamon and cumin, as cooks infuse the flavours of their far-flung homelands into every dish. Before preparing each meal, Simonos Petra's chefs pray to the Virgin Mary and Saint Euphrosynus, the patron saint of cooks.

Between meals, monks practise liturgical chanting. Renowned among Byzantine music specialists, the Simonos Petra's monastic choir has released an album of ecclesiastical chants, garnering widespread acclaim.

A rocky finger of land pointing out to the Aegean Sea, Mount Athos, in northern Greece, has been the beating heart of the Eastern Orthodox Church since the 10th Century. The holy peninsula's towering cliffs and fragrant chestnut forests have been home to monastic communities, underground hideaways and hermits' cells for more than a millennium.

Today, scattered across Athos are 20 sprawling monasteries – 17 Greek, one Russian, one Bulgarian and one Serbian. Together, they form a time capsule of Byzantine tradition, devoid of any distractions that may stand between the monks and God. Women, along with all female animals, save cats, have been banned from the mountain since its earliest days, when the brothers had to protect their sanctuaries from plundering pirates, Catholic crusaders and Ottoman opportunists.

Known in Greek as the Holy Mountain, the 33,000-hectare Mount Athos has been semi-autonomous since Emperor John I Tzimiskes signed its first constitution in 972CE. Since then, its governing body, the Holy Community, has been one of the world's longest continually working governments. Today, 2,000 monks from Greece, Romania, Georgia, Bulgaria, Russia, Serbia, Britain, the US and Australia reside in Athos – united beneath the Byzantine flag's double-headed eagle. Drawn from across the world by a spiritual hunger, they are dedicated to the time-honoured rituals of Byzantine life and the fundamental virtues by which they have agreed to live: poverty, chastity and obedience.



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PANTOKRATOROS

1357

Hugging the rocky shore lies Pantokratoros. A patchwork of hand-cut brick, punctuated by glimpses of eggshell blue and terracotta, it was founded in the 14th Century by brothers Alexios and John – a high-ranking Byzantine military and civil officer, respectively.

Here, and across all of Mount Athos, monks follow the solar clock of Byzantium, where the day begins at sunset. Rising just hours after midnight, monks wake for private prayer, before a wooden gong echoes through the labyrinthine passageways, calling them to morning service and daily liturgy. A second service is held before the morning meal is served at around 9am – taken in silence, bar the reading of a religious text, it usually lasts less than 15 minutes.

After daily tasks are complete, monks attend vesper prayers, before the second and final meal of the day. A dimly lit Compline service commences in the evening, and sweet incense hangs in the air. Afterwards, the monks enjoy some free time – many read or debate scripture, others meet with spiritual teachers, seeking answers to the day's conundrums. According to tradition, as sunset falls, the monastery gates are locked and not opened again until morning.

GREAT LAVRA

963

The oldest monastery on Mount Athos, Great Lavra perches 520 feet atop a cliff overlooking the azure ocean. Founded by Athanasius the Athonite – who lost his life along with six others when the church's dome collapsed during construction – it is a striking example of Byzantine architecture.

Designed like a fortified town, a vast, rectangular fortress – complete with 15 towers, 37 chapels, monks' cells and even a guesthouse – protects the central courtyard. Inside, the refectory, kitchen and library flank the beetroot-hued main church, or katholikon, which takes prime position, like a sacred pinnacle. The most revered of all Mount Athos' monasteries, Great Lavra's library contains one of the largest collections of Byzantine manuscripts in the world – with more than 2,000 Greek texts and 20,000 books.

Here, daily life is divided between three elements: prayer, work and rest. While worship takes the form of services, liturgy and scripture study, the importance placed on work is twofold – not only does it support individual spiritual development, but the community, too. At Great Larva, monks tend to the monastery's 28 hectares of vegetable gardens, olive groves and vineyards, while others take on roles such as fishing, building, cooking, cleaning, librarianship, craftwork and restoration. This ritualistic pattern, unchanged for more than 1,000 years, and infused with symbolic meaning, is believed to be the path to purification.

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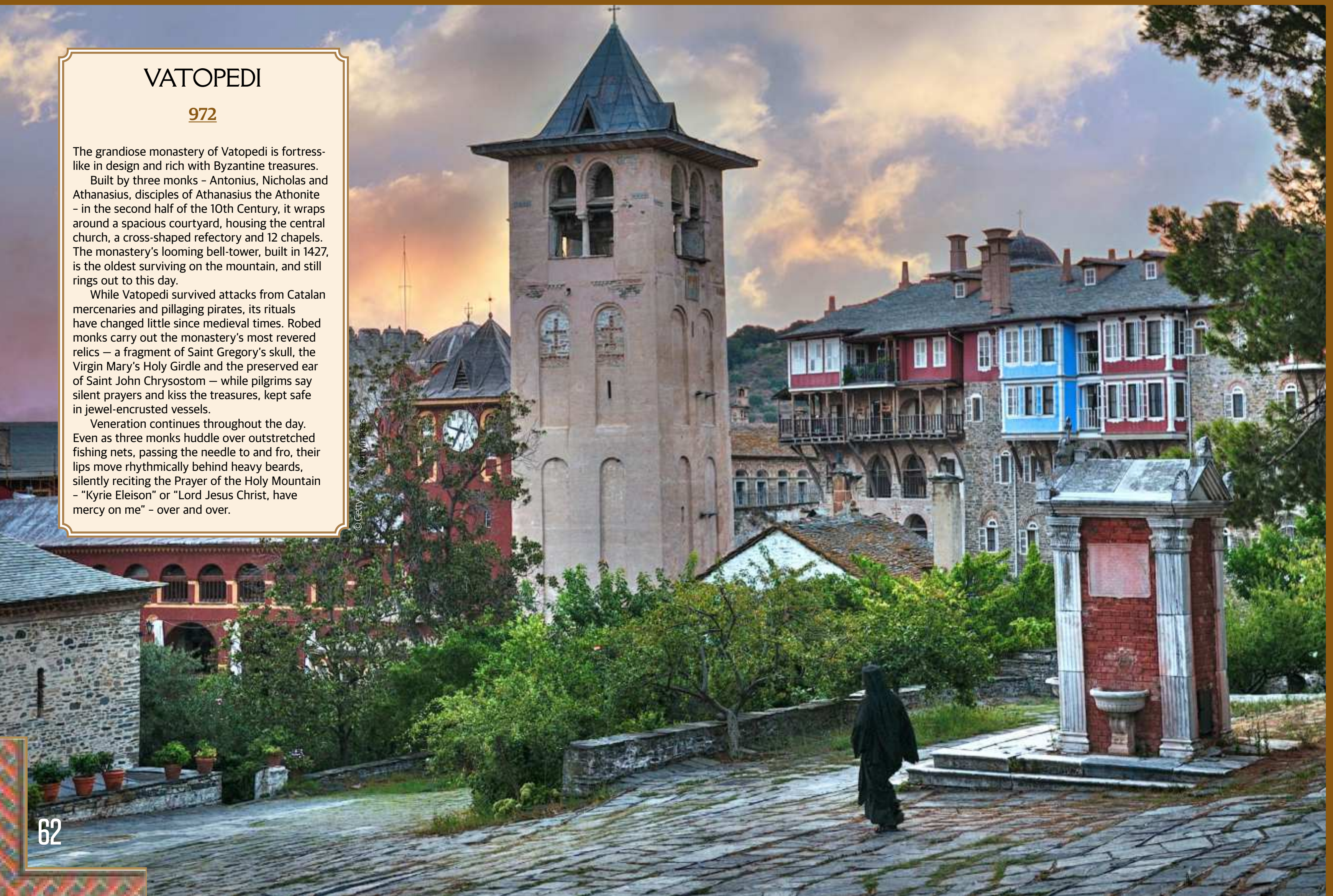

VATOPEDI

972

The grandiose monastery of Vatopedi is fortress-like in design and rich with Byzantine treasures.

Built by three monks – Antonius, Nicholas and Athanasius, disciples of Athanasius the Athonite – in the second half of the 10th Century, it wraps around a spacious courtyard, housing the central church, a cross-shaped refectory and 12 chapels. The monastery's looming bell-tower, built in 1427, is the oldest surviving on the mountain, and still rings out to this day.

While Vatopedi survived attacks from Catalan mercenaries and pillaging pirates, its rituals have changed little since medieval times. Robed monks carry out the monastery's most revered relics — a fragment of Saint Gregory's skull, the Virgin Mary's Holy Girdle and the preserved ear of Saint John Chrysostom — while pilgrims say silent prayers and kiss the treasures, kept safe in jewel-encrusted vessels.

Veneration continues throughout the day. Even as three monks huddle over outstretched fishing nets, passing the needle to and fro, their lips move rhythmically behind heavy beards, silently reciting the Prayer of the Holy Mountain – "Kyrie Eleison" or "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" – over and over.

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HILANDAR

1198

Between a sea of vegetable gardens, orange orchards and silvery-green olive groves, the domes of Hilandar stretch heavenward. The monastery was established in the late 12th Century by the former prince of Serbia, Stefan Nemanja – who abdicated to take monastic vows and became Monk Symeon – and his son, Saint Sava. As Hilandar grew in stature, it became the first Serbian university, educating eight of the first ten archbishops of Serbia, including Saint Sava.

The monastery houses one of the largest collections of Serbian relics in the world and numerous miraculous icons, including the Bogorodica Trojeručica, the wonderworking image of the Virgin Mary with three hands. Said to have been owned by John of Damascus, the icon was credited with his miraculous healing in 717 after he was falsely accused of treachery against Caliph Al Walid I, and his hand was cut off.

Like all Athos monasteries, Hilandar's architecture is a symbolic reflection of Byzantine monastic virtues. Inwardness is embodied by the monastery's remote setting, encircled behind thick stone walls. Wooden balconies, one of its few outward-facing features, act as spiritual spaces for private prayer and quiet contemplation. Sacred spaces are not only shaped by architecture, but also by the use of light, music and powerful incense. Light, in particular, has special significance in Byzantine tradition, symbolising Christ.

© Getty

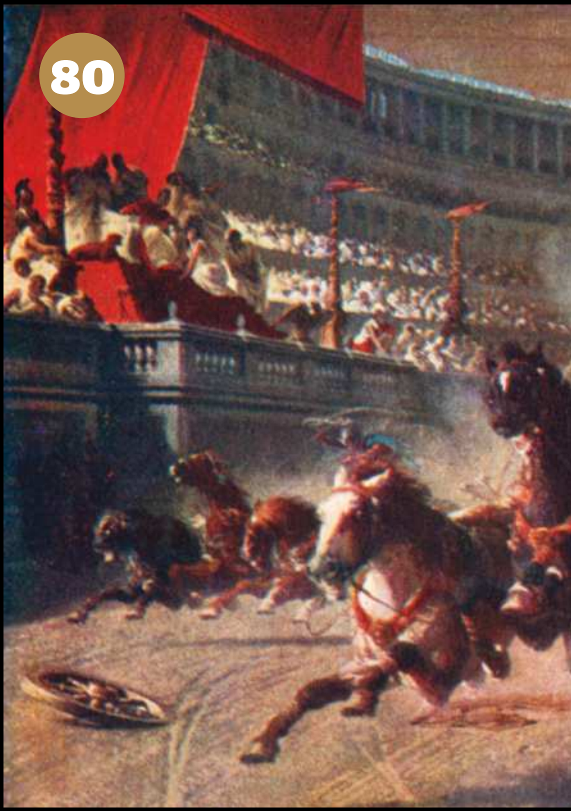
IVIRON

980

Established late in the 10th Century by two monks, Ioannis and Euthymius, to house Georgian clergy and priests, Iviron nestles comfortably between the sea and the vegetation-carpeted slopes. Its defensive walls, crowned with colourful dwellings, surround the domed central church.

The monastery not only boasts the relics of more canonised saints than any other on Athos, but also houses its most famous icon: the Panagia Portaitissa. Painted by Luke the Evangelist, the icon of the Virgin Mary was once owned by a widow in Nicea. Legend has it that during a period of iconoclasm, she cast it in the Mediterranean, praying it would survive. Years later, it was rescued just off the coast of Athos and has since been attributed to a number of miracles.

Iviron's monastic community is devoted to restoring damaged buildings both within, and surrounding, the monastery. They also play host to international scientists, keen to study the historic heirlooms in their possession. Whether cleaning floors or conserving priceless icons, the monks don traditional black habits – worn to represent their symbolic death to the world, now living only to serve God. Each carries a prayer rope typically consisting of 100 knots, to keep track of how many prayers they have recited – though some have just 33 knots, representing the age when Jesus was crucified.



DAILY LIFE

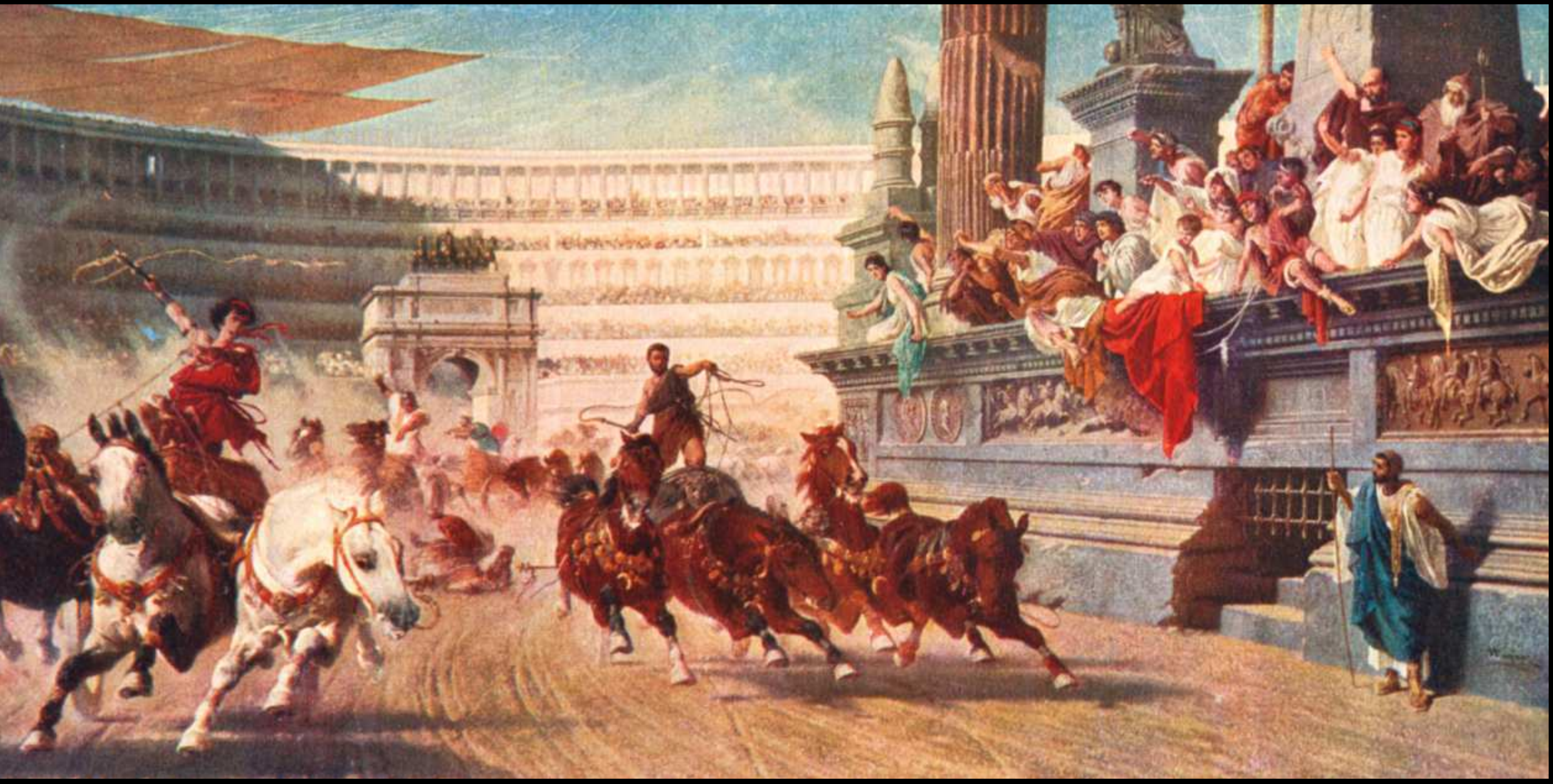
66 **CONSTANTINOPLE THROUGH TIME**
The story of the Queen of Cities, the Byzantine capital destined to change world history forever

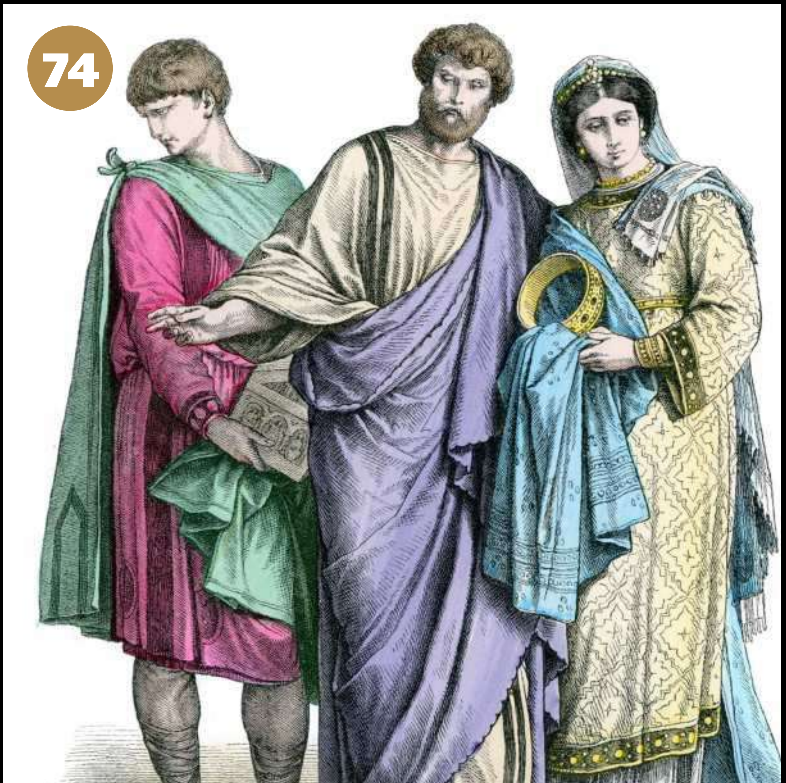
72 **INSIDE HAGIA SOPHIA**
Peek inside the most iconic building on Constantinople's glorious skyline

74 **THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL**
From eyeliner to ivory boxes, the Byzantines took pride in their appearance, as these artefacts show

76 **THE BLUES AND THE GREENS**
In Byzantium, sport really was a matter of life and death

80 **DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CHARIOT RACER**
Follow a charioteer from morning til night, as he sees success (or failure) in the Hippodrome





74

CONSTANTINOPLE THROUGH THE AGES

A short history of the Queen of Cities, the capital destined to change history forever

Written by Nikolaos Tzoumerkas

In 324, Constantine the Great decided to move the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Byzantium. Six years later, the new city was inaugurated. New Rome was a reality and would remain the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire for the next 11 centuries. In its early history, Constantinople resembled Rome - it was administered by a city prefect and had a senate. Indeed, most of its institutions closely followed the example of Rome. Moving the capital was a bold decision by Constantine, but it was not a dangerous one. As Greek historian Herodian wrote, "Where the emperor is, Rome is." Constantine converted to Christianity towards the end of his life, changing world history forever. With the gradual Christianisation of the empire, new architectural styles emerged, while new traditions and various aspects of daily life changed rapidly.

The Nika Riots lasted almost a week and left tens of thousands dead and much of the city in ruins

The most important figure in the history of the Eastern Roman Empire was Emperor Justinian I (527-565). During his reign, Constantinople went through radical changes. The most famous event that took place in the capital of the Byzantine Empire in the age of Justinian were the Nika Riots, in the Hippodrome in 532. The unrest was eventually crushed by generals Belisarius and Mundus, as well as the eunuch Narses, who managed to confine the majority of the rioters in the Hippodrome and slaughtered around 30,000 people. The brutal crackdown signalled the end of the riot. The streets of Constantinople were burned and destroyed while, in the Hippodrome, rivers of blood flowed. The real hero who saved Justinian's reign, however, was Empress Theodora, who convinced her husband to not leave the capital, but to instead stay and confront the rioters. Her speech to him is saved thanks to the work of chronicler Malalas. She said, "It is impossible for a man who has seen the light not also die, for one who has been an emperor it is unendurable to be a fugitive."

Once the chaos was over, Justinian decided to rebuild Hagia Sophia, which had been destroyed during the riots. Unlike its predecessors, though, the new church would be larger - it was destined to be the most magnificent building in the empire. In 532, immediately after the riots, Justinian ordered Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus, two of the age's greatest architects, to build the new church. In 537, only five years later, the church - which would possess the largest dome of its kind for more than 1,000 years - was inaugurated by Menas, the patriarch of Constantinople. The new church was destined to be the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and, to reflect its glory, coronations of new emperors would happen in Hagia Sophia along with other imperial ceremonies.

In the centuries that followed Justinian's reign, the Byzantine Empire faced many challenges. The incessant wars with the Persians led to the siege of Constantinople in 626, by the Avars and the Sassanid Persians, while Emperor Heraclius was away campaigning against the latter. Constantinople was successfully defended. Later, the Arabs also attempted two unsuccessful sieges.

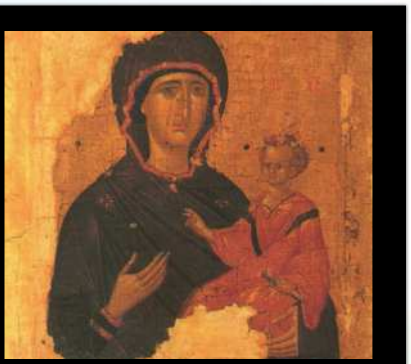
© Getty

The Avar Siege of Constantinople, 626

In 626, the Avars and Sassanid Persians attempted to conquer Constantinople. Byzantium's Emperor Heraclius was away, fighting a campaign against the Persians at the time, so the capital was to be defended by fewer men than usual. Around 80,000 Avars and Persians were deployed for the siege, while the Byzantines had only around 12,000 troops under the command of patrician Bonus, plus Patriarch Sergius.

The odds were against the Byzantines, but Sergius led a procession to the Hodegetria, an icon of the Virgin Mary, raising the morale of the soldiers who believed that they were protected by God. The siege proved unsuccessful and the Byzantines won decisively. To celebrate, an unknown author wrote a hymn to the Virgin Mary called the Akathist Hymn, which means the unseated hymn.

This song is chanted in the Greek Orthodox Church every year and gives thanks the Virgin Mary for protecting the city. During the recital the whole congregation remains standing to honour the Theotokos, the invincible champion. The siege was the first test for the Theodosian walls, which were destined to protect the city for the next 1,000 years.



The Hodegetria, the Virgin Mary icon that inspired the defence of the city

An aerial view of Istanbul, Constantinople's modern-day descendent

Statue of Roman Emperor Constantine the Great outside York Minster

Image Source: Poliphilo

Key to the Byzantine capital's survival was its strong Theodosian Walls and the use of a deadly weapon, known as Greek fire.

Indeed, it can be argued the main reason the so-called 'Queen of Cities' survived for more than 1,000 years was its impenetrable walls, which survived multiple sieges and enemies - such as those coming from the Avars, Arabs, Rus and the Bulgars. During the Roman times, the city was fortified with a wall built by Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211). The wall's expansion by 2.8km started during the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337) and was completed by his son, Constantius II (337-361). Unfortunately, these fortifications are not preserved, so the only way to know about them is through the surviving primary sources. The rapid development and increase of the population over the years led to the inevitable housing of many citizens outside of the city walls. New fortifications had to be erected to protect both the water supply of Constantinople and the citizens who were not residing within the walls. The task was undertaken during the reign of Emperor Theodosius II (408-450). He extended and fortified his capital, rendering it the biggest and safest city in the world, which was fated to defend itself against numerous attacks throughout the next 1,000 years. It was a double wall that remained well manned and was constantly restored. Indeed, the Theodosian Walls were so durable that they remained effective even a millenium after they were erected, making the city incredibly difficult to conquer.

Theodosius II was also responsible for improving Constantinople's scholarly scene. He decided to found an educational institution in 425 in order to make Constantinople an intellectual hub, and to bring education under stricter imperial control. The institution was named University of the Palace Hall of Magnaura, or Pandidakterion. It offered a wide range of courses, from law and philosophy to medicine, music and astronomy. Especially after Justinian closed the Academy of Athens in 529 and Alexandria was conquered by the Arabs in 641, the Pandidakterion was essentially the only place to offer a solid educational background to students. Furthermore, contrary to the common belief that the medieval world was misogynistic and did not allow for the education of women, in the Byzantine Empire, both genders had opportunities to gain an education. Many women participated in cultural aspects of the daily life. Such an example was the historian Anna Komnene, one of the brightest figures in the long history of the empire. Thanks to the Pandidakterion, the city went through a phase of exceptional growth of letters and arts known as the "Palaiologan Renaissance".

But such great progress could not continue without an inevitable clash of ideas and agendas. During the 8th and 9th Centuries, the empire faced an internal struggle related to the use of icons. The iconoclasm, as it was named, was a movement against religious images and other visual representations, which led to a plethora of destroyed icons in Constantinople.

> The double Theodosian Walls, with their 96 towers, proved impregnable for a millenium. Large sections still remain intact

The Horses of San Marco (Venice), which decorated Constantinople's Hippodrome until 1204

Image Source: Petar Milošević

The obelisks of the Hippodrome, as pictured during the Ottoman era

Image Source: James Robertson

The interior of Hagia Sophia, which also features Islamic art and calligraphy since being converted into a mosque

Image Source: Maksym Kozlenko

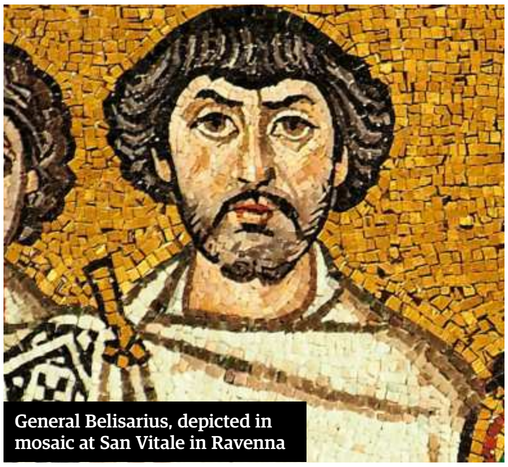

General Belisarius, depicted in mosaic at San Vitale in Ravenna

Image Source: Petar Milošević

Holy figures that decorated the Orthodox Churches were turned into images of animals, birds and plants, or were simply replaced by the symbol of the Cross. In 843, Empress Theodora restored the icons and stopped the further destruction of valuable artworks.

Things began to look up again for the city in the next couple of centuries. From the 10th Century onwards, the *Book Of The Eparch* provides us with details about the economic life of the capital. Constantinople's economy was flourishing, and different guilds held monopolies over different goods. Buoyed by success, the population of the city is estimated to have been up to 800,000.

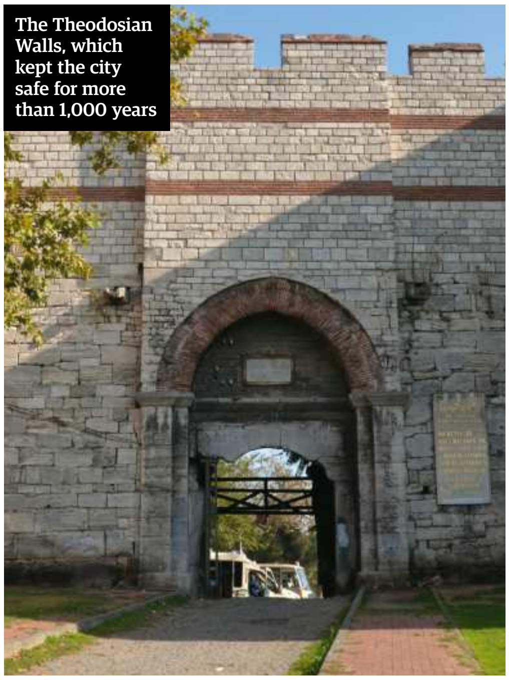

The Theodosian Walls, which kept the city safe for more than 1,000 years

Image Source: Carole Raddato

After the iconoclasm, arts in Constantinople were revived by the Macedonian dynasty, and many workshops started working with ivory and precious metals to spectacular effect. As a result, Constantinople's artworks were exported to every part of the empire, and beyond.

One of the greatest dynasties that made an impact on Constantinople was the Komnenian (1081-1185) period. The city became wealthier, with streams of gold entering daily. Because of the prosperity, a plethora of edifices were built during that era. The most famous examples include the monastery of Pantokrator. Within the monastery operated the biggest philanthropic institution of the empire. Emperor John II (1118-1143) decided to found a hospital that would host 50 patients with expenses covered by the imperial treasury. The first emperor of the Komnenoi dynasty, Alexios I (1081-1118) moved to the Palace of Blachernae as his main residence. The palace was built around 500AD, but before Alexios, it was never used as the main imperial residence. Alexios' grandson Manuel oversaw the revival of mosaic artworks, including a new mosaic depicting John II and his wife Empress Irene, alongside the Virgin Mary and Jesus, that was added in Hagia Sophia. Silk was being processed in Constantinopolitan workshops, which produced beautiful creations depicting eagles, lions and other animals. However, the real impact of the capital's art was outside the empire. Venice, Russia, Sicily and other cultural centres were heavily influenced by the Byzantine art of the 12th Century.

During the Fourth Crusade, however, Constantinople faced massive destruction and was sacked by the armies of the Crusaders. Instead of attempting to recapture Jerusalem from the Muslims, which was their initial goal, they sacked

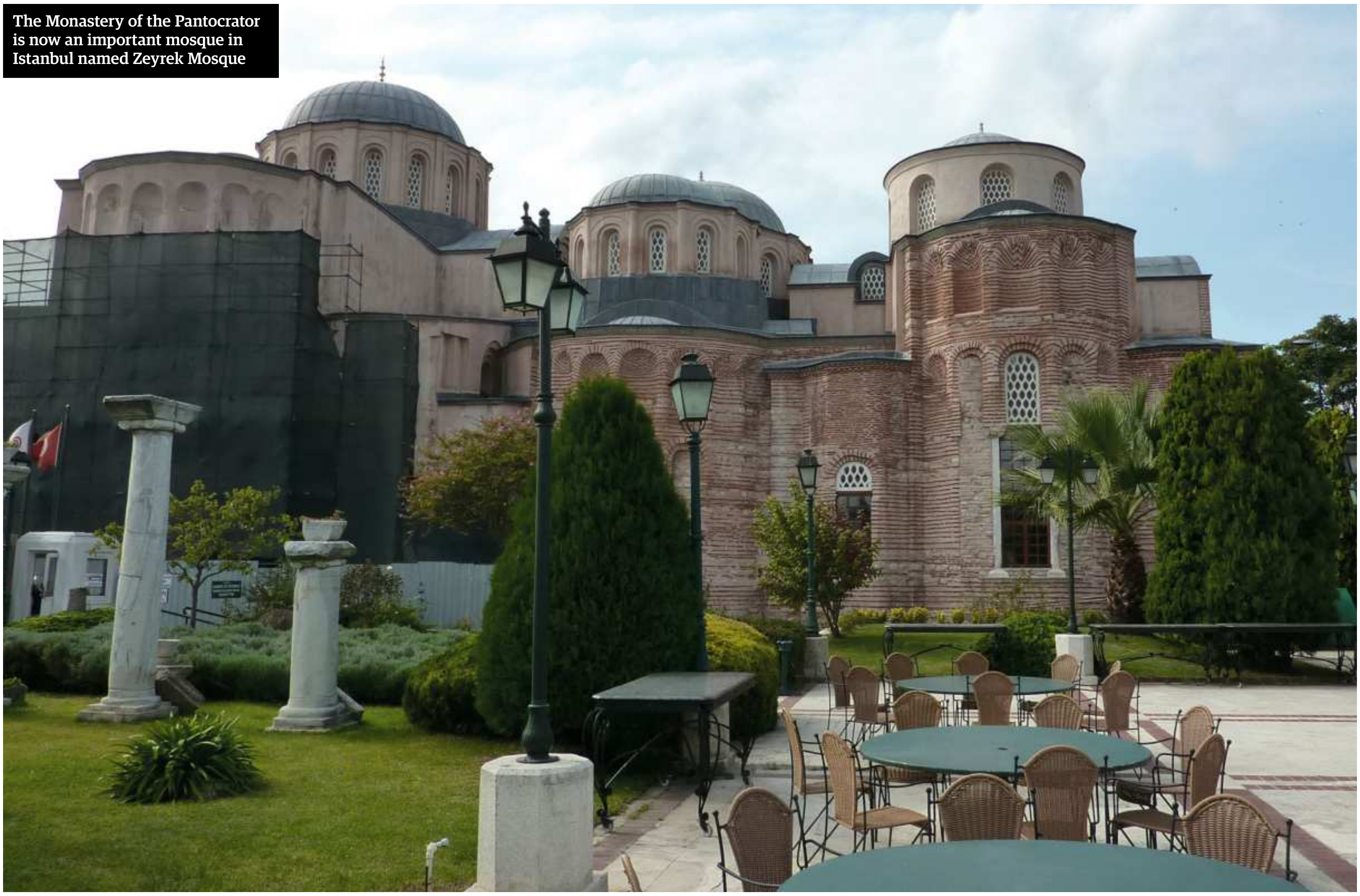
Legends concerning the fall

Right after the fall of the Queen of Cities in 1453, many tales began being told to keep the hopes of the Eastern Romans alive. After all, they did not want to accept the end of their glorious history. One of the most famous legends is that of the Marble King, associated with the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine Palaiologos XI. It's said that when the Ottomans conquered the city and started slaughtering the soldiers and civilians, an angel appeared from the sky to rescue the emperor. The angel turned Constantine into a marble statue and hid him in a cave. The legend says that God will one day bring the emperor back to life to free Constantinople from the Turks and reestablish the empire.

Another legend mentions a monk who was frying fish next to a river. A bird informed him of the fall of the city and the fish jumped out of the pan and into the river. They will wait there until Constantinople is free again, when then they will jump back to the pan to be fried. A final story says that during the fall, a liturgy was taking place in Hagia Sophia. When the Ottomans entered the church, a door magically appeared, allowing the priest to hide until Constantinople could become Byzantine again. Only then will he finish the liturgy.

Constantine XI, the Marble King, the last emperor of Constantinople

Image Source:



The Monastery of the Pantocrator is now an important mosque in Istanbul named Zeyrek Mosque

Image Source: Chris06

Population of Constantinople

Constantinople, the greatest city of the medieval world, was successful largely because of its geographical position and the size of its population. Its wealth accumulation was inevitable due to the non-stop trading that took place across the Mediterranean, with Constantinople being at the centre of a huge trading network that stretched from Asia to North Africa and Western Europe. The population of Byzantium shortly before the move of the capital from Rome was roughly 20,000 people, but in the following years, until 400CE, that number grew rapidly. It reached 150,000 by 360CE and then 200,000 around 400CE. During the early years of Justinian's reign, the population of the city is believed to have reached one million people.

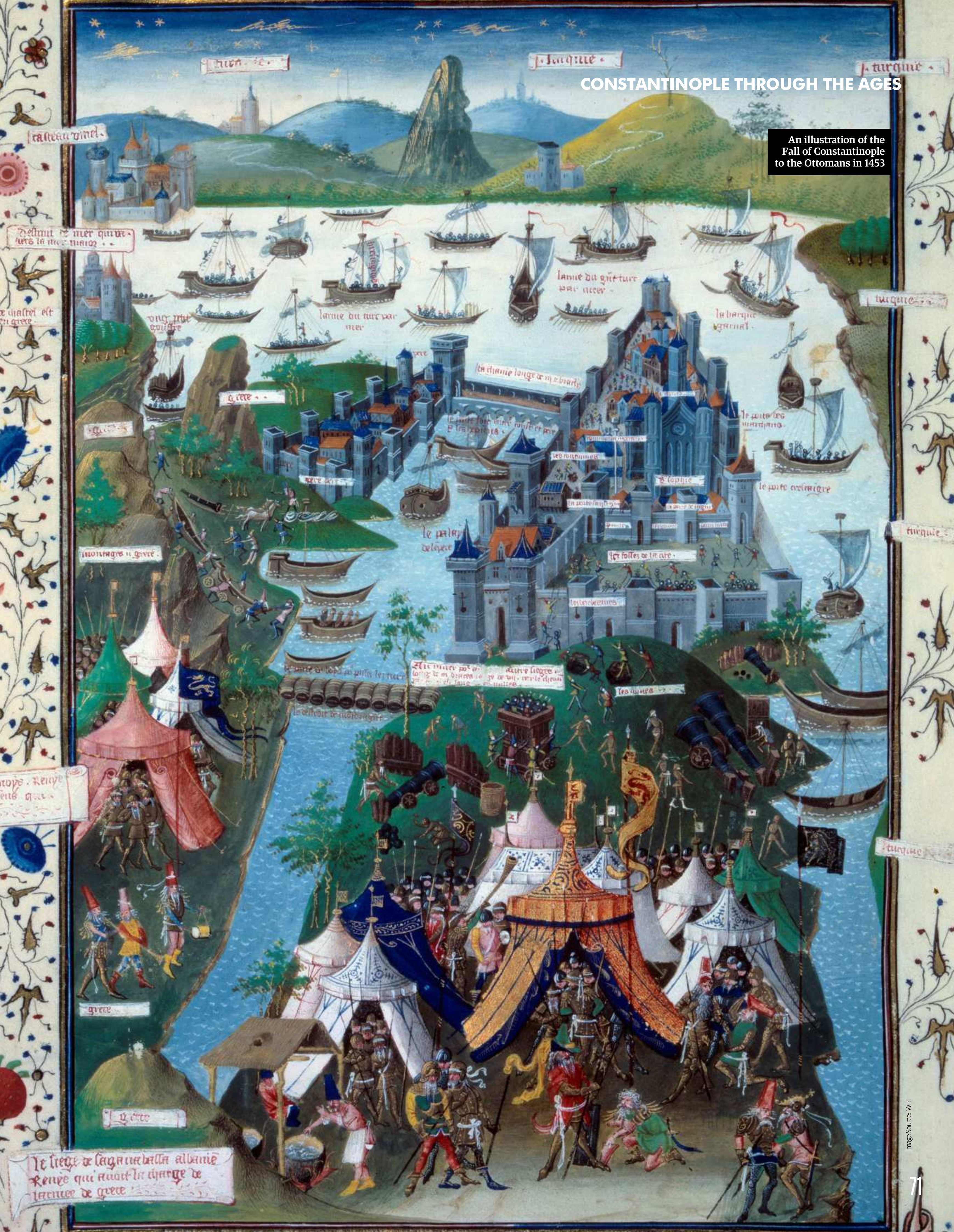
But in 541-542, the infamous Justinianic plague killed about 40 per cent of the city's population and it would never fully recover. In the following centuries, the inhabitants of Constantinople ranged in number from 250,000 to 350,000. After the plague of the 14th Century, though, the population plummeted to just 50,000 citizens. Even the greatest centre of the medieval world was not immune to a plethora of issues, from war to disease, and ultimately, these led to a decrease of the population and even its subsequent fall to the Ottomans, who would become an unstoppable force throughout the 15th Century.

two Christian cities. In 1202, due to financial problems, they sacked the Christian Croatian city Zara and, two years later, in 1204, they then lay siege to and captured Constantinople itself. The Queen of Cities was sacked because the army of the Crusaders wanted to take revenge for the massacre of the Latin (Western Christian) population of the city in 1182.

What followed was unexpected and unheard of. For three days, the Crusaders pillaged, murdered, raped and destroyed wherever they went. Their hatred towards the Byzantines was shown with the desecration of Hagia Sophia, the greatest monument of Eastern Christianity. The sack of Constantinople led to a fast decline of the empire and rendered the Byzantines vulnerable to the rising Turkish threat in the east. To add insult to injury, huge numbers of artworks were destroyed or stolen and placed mainly in Venice, as Venetians had acquired a unique appreciation for Byzantine art. The Byzantines believed that even if their city had been conquered by the Turks, the damage dealt would not have been as extensive as that carried out by the Crusaders.

In 1261, the Byzantines managed to recapture Constantinople. They faced the difficult task of restoring all the damaged buildings and defending their city against a growing number of external enemies. The Palaiologan dynasty saw its once glorious empire now constantly shrinking, with civil wars gradually leading to its inevitable end. The economic resources of Constantinople were reduced significantly. Furthermore, in 1347 the Black Death took hold in Constantinople, leading to a drastic reduction of the city's population. The following emperors tried to rebuild the number of people, which was approximately 50,000 in the final years before the fall. The past glories of Late Antiquity, however, were long gone. The Ottoman conquest was a reality the Byzantines had to live with. In 1453, Constantinople finally fell and a new era, under Ottoman occupation, was inaugurated.

But the 'Queen of Cities' was not betrayed by its walls or its defenders. Those few people left to defend Constantinople against the Ottomans fought heroically against a formidable enemy. Unfortunately, a gate was mistakenly left open and allowed the invaders to enter the city. For three days the conquerors plundered the city, raped women and killed many civilians. The fall of the greatest Christian city was a blow to Christianity, and to the West in general, which lived in fear of facing the same fate as the Byzantines. Indeed, the presence of the Ottomans in Constantinople would continue to make Western observers nervous for the next 500 years.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larmee du turc par mer
la barque garnal
grece
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montagnes de grece
les fosses de la cite
le siege de laganaballa albanie
Renée qui avoit la charge de
larmee de grece

An illustration of the Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453

Image Source: Wiki

HAGIA SOPHIA

TURKEY, 537 – PRESENT

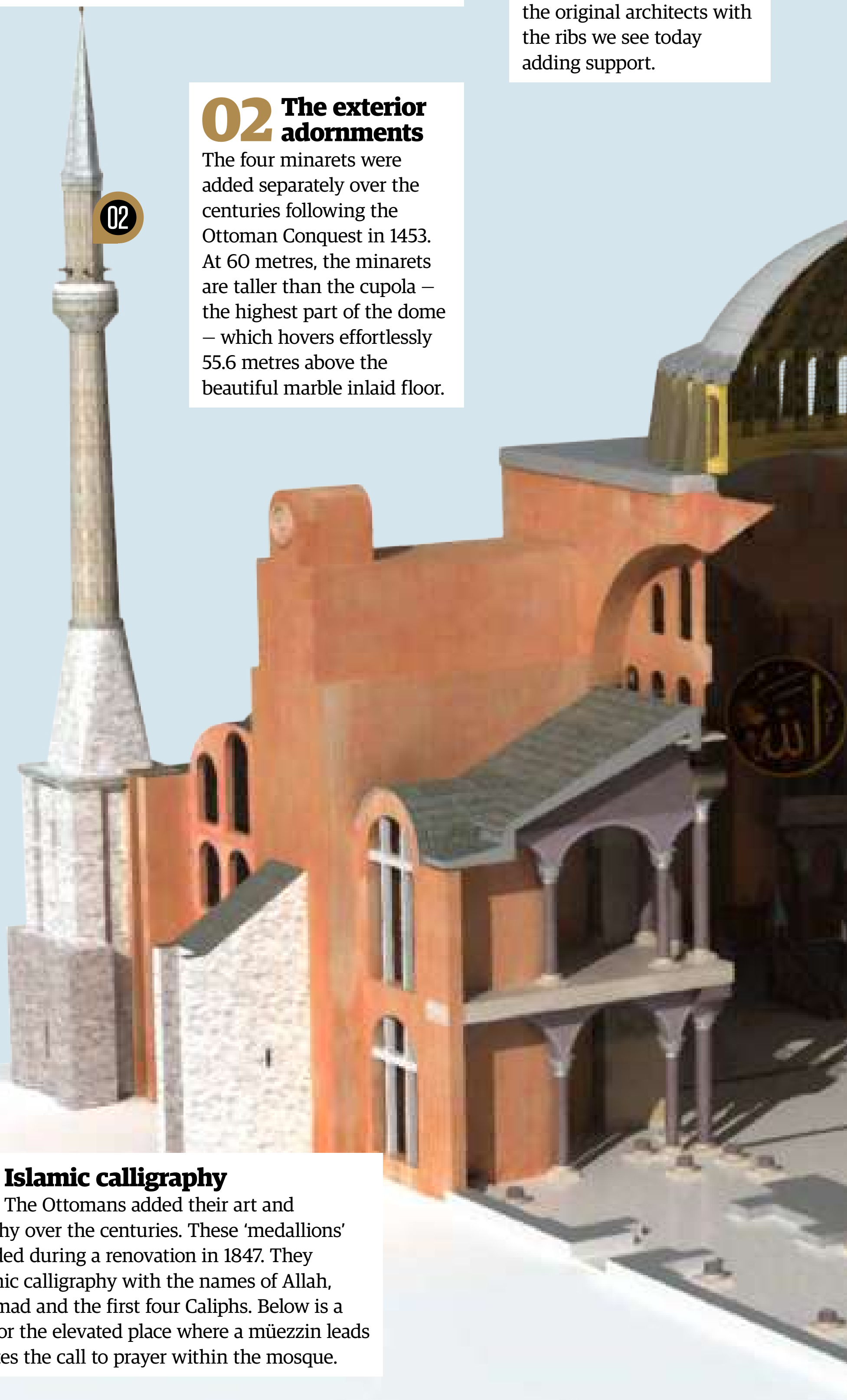
The site of Hagia Sophia has been a holy place for centuries. Constantine I built a church on the foundations of a pagan temple in 325 CE and this was restored and then extended several times. However, after the church was destroyed by fire during the Nika Riots in 532, Emperor Justinian I had a grand vision. Wanting to restore the empire to its former glory, he decided to build the greatest church the world had ever seen.

Justinian hired a pair of famed mathematicians, Anthemios and Isidore, to design it. In 537, just under six years later, the Hagia Sophia (meaning 'Holy Wisdom') was completed. Its enormous dome relied on a revolutionary design that made it the largest in the world for almost a millennium.

Despite its incredible design, the centuries were hard on the awe-inspiring church and subsequent Byzantine emperors used repairs as opportunities to add their name to it. Some were beautiful additions – for example, Justinian's successor Justin II covered the walls with intricate mosaics. However, not every ruler was a patron of the arts. In 726, Emperor Leo III, following a civil war, forbade religious icons and this iconoclasm continued until 842 and saw the destruction of religious icons in churches across the land.

As the Byzantine Empire slowly collapsed, Islamic ones like the Ottomans replaced it. This threat prompted Western Christian nations to crusade and reclaim the 'Holy Land'. The Crusades never achieved long-term success, however, and even catalysed the fall of Constantinople in 1453 when Ottoman sultan Mehmed the Conqueror took the city. Fortunately, he was struck by the beauty of Hagia Sophia and he made Constantinople his capital. Hagia Sophia (now called Aya Sofya) was converted into a mosque and its Christian art was covered or replaced with Islamic calligraphy. Hagia Sophia's beauty would inspire the next generation of Ottoman art.

When the Ottoman Empire fell after World War I, the secular nation of Turkey was created and Hagia Sophia became a museum, which you can still visit today in modern-day Istanbul.



01 Squaring the circle

What gives Hagia Sophia its beauty is the revolutionary way in which the architects created an immense open space. It is a dome built upon two semi-domes. In order to do this, it was necessary to 'square the circle', which means to build a circular dome upon the square base. Hagia Sophia was one of the first structures to make use of this technique. Byzantine paintings of six-winged angels called seraphs (Greek: hexapterygon) still line the pendentives.

02 The exterior adornments

The four minarets were added separately over the centuries following the Ottoman Conquest in 1453. At 60 metres, the minarets are taller than the cupola – the highest part of the dome – which hovers effortlessly 55.6 metres above the beautiful marble inlaid floor.

03 A miracle of construction

A marvel of engineering, Hagia Sophia was originally completed only five years after construction began. But 20 years later the dome collapsed and was repaired by the nephew of one of the original architects with the ribs we see today adding support.

10 Islamic calligraphy

The Ottomans added their art and calligraphy over the centuries. These 'medallions' were added during a renovation in 1847. They are Islamic calligraphy with the names of Allah, Muhammad and the first four Caliphs. Below is a minbar, or the elevated place where a müezzin leads and recites the call to prayer within the mosque.

04 Christian and Islamic fusion

Both the Byzantines and the Ottomans removed Christian mosaics at different times and replaced them with nonrepresentational art like calligraphy and geometric shapes. The Islamic calligraphy inside the dome probably covers an original Byzantine mosaic. A surviving mosaic of a Christ Pantocrator, the so-called Deësis mosaic, probably dates from the 13th century and is considered one of the finest examples of late Byzantine mosaics.

05 Imperial strength

Supporting each hemisphere are four 17-meter tall porphyry columns. Like the Romans before them, the Byzantine emperors prized porphyry marble in part because it was rare, but also because it was purple – the colour of royalty. However, porphyry is known to fracture under stress, so the basilica's columns had to be reinforced over the centuries with bronze collars. The capitals of the columns have Justinian's monogram carved into them.

06 Doge Dandolo's tomb

Hagia Sophia started out as a Greek Orthodox church. Then the Fourth Crusade, led by Venetians in 1204, sacked Constantinople and turned it into a Catholic one until the Byzantines returned in 1261. In 1453, the Ottomans turned it into a mosque, which it remained until 1934 when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk ordered it to be turned into a museum. A reminder of the Venetian Crusade, Dandolo, the 41st doge of Venice, is buried here.

07 The greatest temple ever built

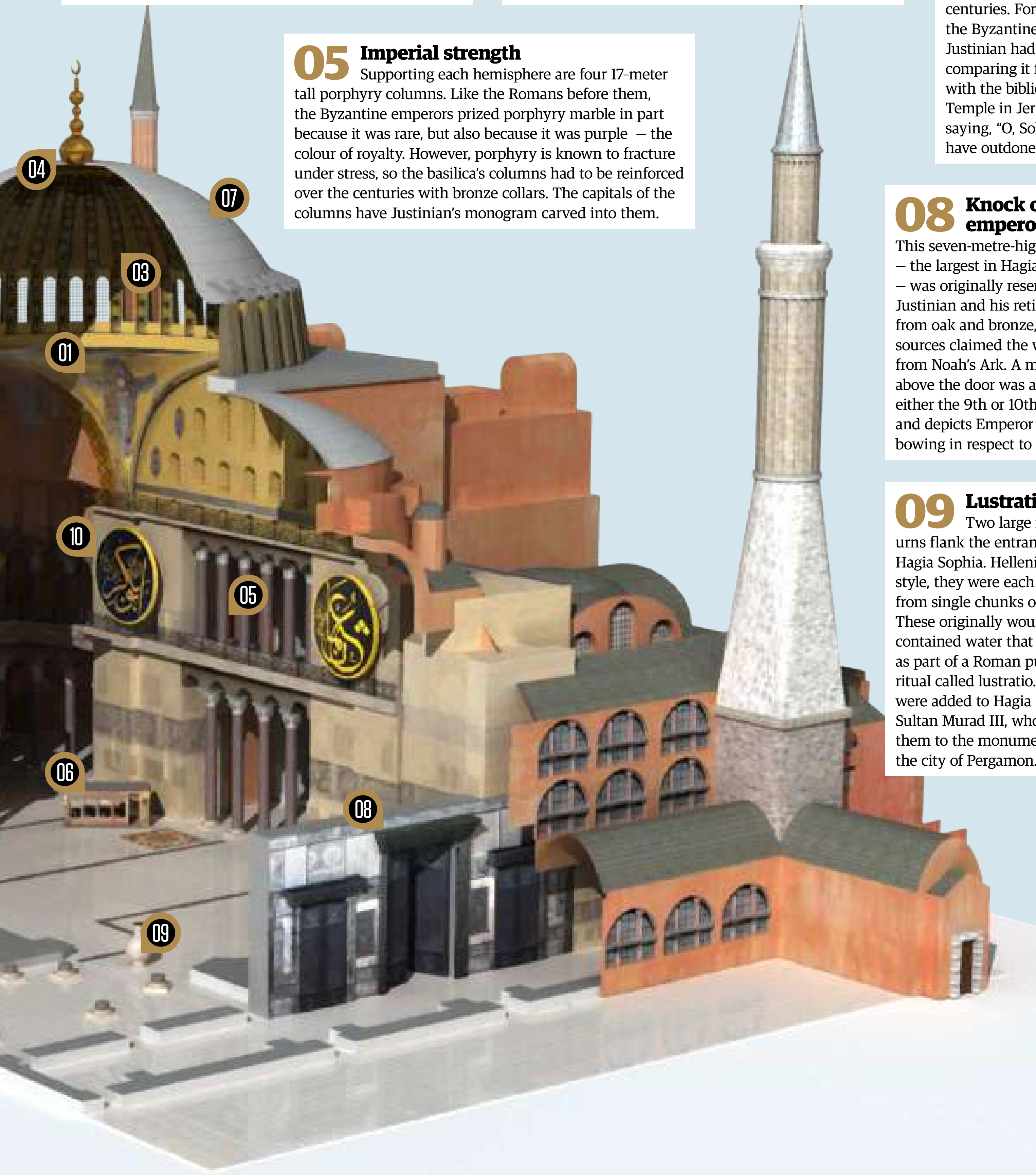
Even today, when one gazes into the ancient dome, one is left speechless in its awe-inspiring space and history spanning centuries. Fortunately, the Byzantine emperor Justinian had the words, comparing it favourably with the biblical First Temple in Jerusalem, saying, "O, Solomon, I have outdone thee!"

08 Knock on the emperor door

This seven-metre-high doorway – the largest in Hagia Sophia – was originally reserved for Justinian and his retinue. Made from oak and bronze, Byzantine sources claimed the wood was from Noah's Ark. A mosaic above the door was added in either the 9th or 10th century and depicts Emperor Leo VI bowing in respect to Christ.

09 Lustration urns

Two large marble urns flank the entrance to Hagia Sophia. Hellenistic in style, they were each carved from single chunks of marble. These originally would have contained water that was used as part of a Roman purification ritual called lustratio. They were added to Hagia Sophia by Sultan Murad III, who brought them to the monument from the city of Pergamon.



© Adrian Mann

The Bold and the Beautiful

From eyeliner to ivory boxes, the Byzantines took pride in their appearance, with a shared culture of beauty in all its forms

Written by Joanne Al-Samarae

Even today, the shadow of Byzantium looms large over the world of fashion and beauty. Known for their outfits made from bold colours, dripping in gold and jewels, modern fashionistas can learn a lot from the wealthy men and women of Constantinople.

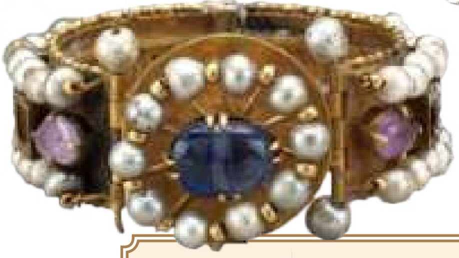
At the start of the Byzantine period, customs relating to beauty and fashion were very similar to those found in the Western Roman Empire. They draped themselves in togas, and dressed themselves with jewellery to complete their look. Only the richest members of society could afford lavish jewels, so wearing them was a statement of one's power and wealth. In fact, the Byzantines liked gold so much that, towards the end of the era, gold plate was used for jewellery instead, because there may have been a shortage of gold.

Unlike their Western Roman counterparts, however, the Byzantines did not like to wear too much makeup, or use skincare remedies. Instead, they looked east for inspiration, preferring the heady perfumes of Persia, India, and beyond.

As the empire grew further away from its Western Roman roots, fashion evolved to suit the Byzantine lifestyle. Tunics replaced togas, and a love for elaborate patterns developed. As well as putting to use the many skilled weavers who lived in the empire, brocades were often used on silks, as was embroidery that was strong enough to carry precious metals and gems in its threads.

The Byzantines were clearly a people who liked to look their best. Take a closer peek at the tools they used to make the most of their appearance.

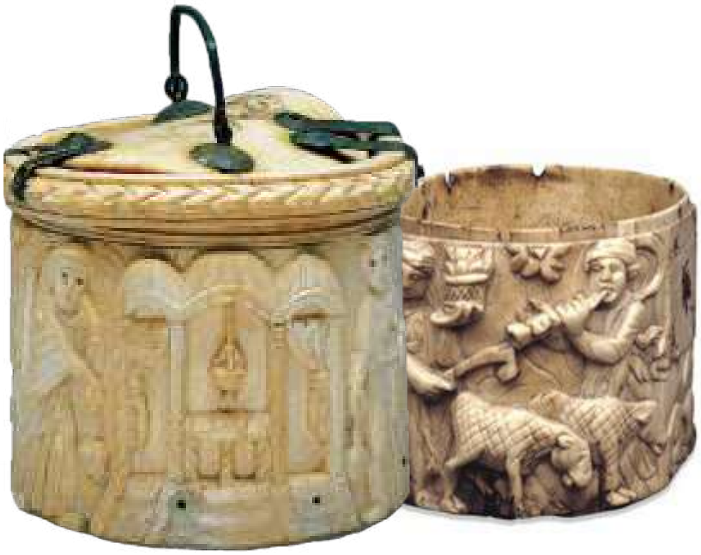
Byzantine jewellery was heavily influenced by the Middle East, and techniques such as filigree were used



© Wiki/ All jewellery pieces Metropolitan Museum of Art

JEWELLERY

An outward expression of social standing, and appreciation for beautifully decorative objects, Byzantine women would adorn themselves with ornate jewellery. Bracelets, earrings, rings and necklaces were crafted from gold and decorated with precious gems, including amethysts, sapphires, emeralds, garnets and pearls. Pearls, in particular, were highly treasured for their luminous quality. The intricate metalworking technique, opus interrasile, whereby goldsmiths pierce a sheet of metal to create elegant lattice-like patterns, was extremely popular. Later, as the sacred and secular began to overlap, religious jewellery, such as crosses and images of the Virgin Mary, became increasingly sought after. They served as symbols of piety, believed to protect their wearer.



PYXIS

Typically crafted from ivory, thanks to its smooth, luxurious and easily carved quality, Byzantine pyxides, or covered boxes, were used to store precious jewellery, cosmetics or perfumes. Cylindrical in design, many featured a hinged lid – often with a lock to protect valuables against theft by household staff. Reserved for wealthy homeowners, boxes were fashioned from a cross section of an elephant's tusk and hand carved with detailed scenes of fantastical animals and fabled gods, loosely inspired by pagan mythology. Valued as objets d'art, pyxides embodied the popular Byzantine ideology that objects should be both functional and beautiful.

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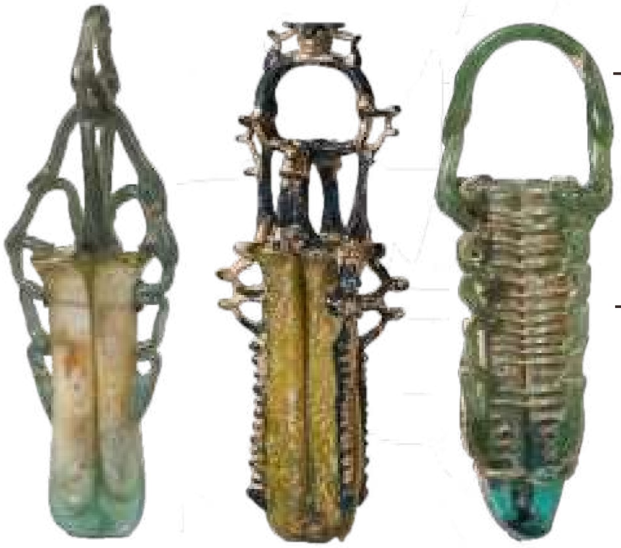
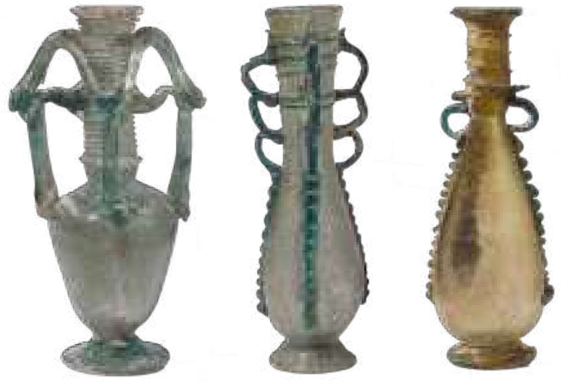


© Wiki/ All jewellery pieces Metropolitan Museum of Art

> “The Byzantines were clearly a people who liked to look their best”

KOHL CONTAINER

With great importance placed on physical beauty, the use of cosmetics, and particularly kohl was common among Byzantine females of all classes, but especially the elite. A natural mineral, kohl was used to darken eyebrows, define eyelids, lengthen lashes and line the eyes – applied using a stick made of ivory, glass or bone. Kohl was stored and transported in glass containers fashioned from blue-green glass, often featuring multiple tubular compartments. By the mid-Byzantine period, the design of kohl containers had become as decorative as they were functional – featuring elaborate basket handles and spiraling trail embellishments in complementary colours.



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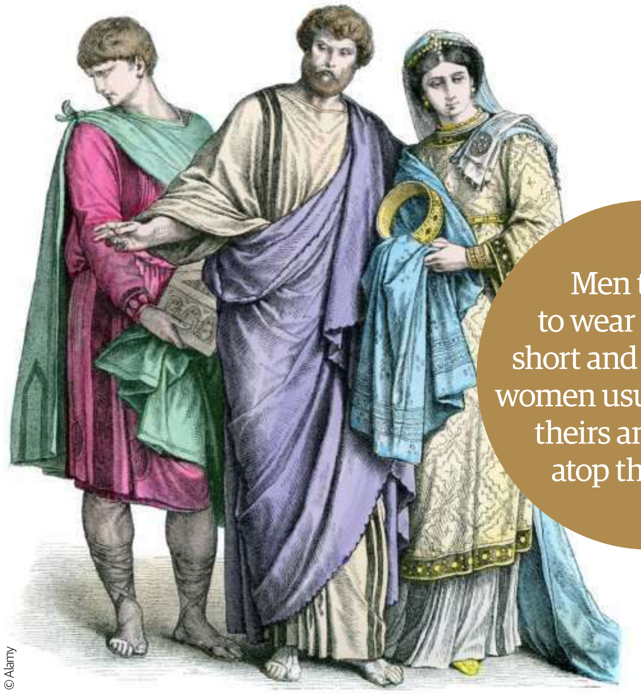
PERFUME BOTTLE

By the dawn of the Byzantine period, the art of perfumery was well established. Used to cleanse holy spaces, in burials and medicine, it was also a popular beautification ritual. Thanks to the empire’s strategic location – sitting on the silk and spice roads – exotic and rare ingredients like rose, iris, styrax, myrtle, marjoram, lily and anise were procured from as far as China, Arabia and India. Mixed by perfumers, the fragrant oils were kept safe in elongated blue or green glass bottles. Hand blown, vessels were decorated with ornate handles, coils and ridged accents. Used by all strata of society, perfumes were rubbed and sometimes or poured onto the body.



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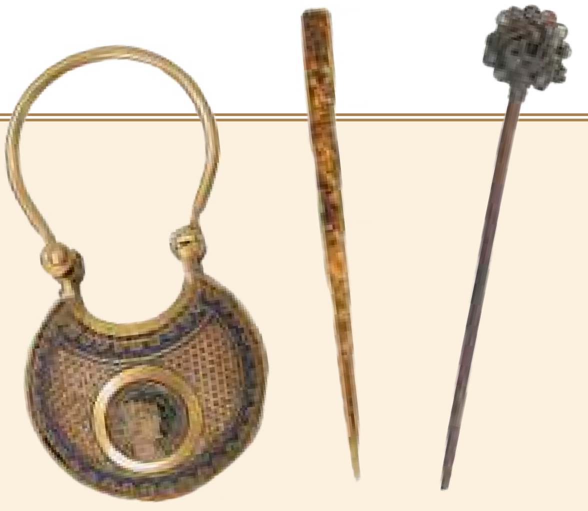
> Men tended to wear their hair short and simple, but women usually braided theirs and piled it atop their head

CLOTHING

When the traditional Roman toga fell out of fashion, Byzantine women and men turned to tunics. Though bright colours were popular, they tended to be more expensive, and certain hues denoted social status. Imperial purple was exceptionally costly – produced by extracting dye from thousands of sea snails, it symbolised the sovereignty and power of the emperor. Elites often accessorised their tunics with a more luxurious gown or robe, worn on top. Women’s gowns, made of intricately patterned silk imported from Egypt and Syria, often featured long trumpet sleeves. Elaborate collars, hems and cuffs were heavily embroidered with silver or gold thread – some even embellished with pearls and gems.



HAIR ACCESSORIES

In addition to expressing individual style, Byzantine hair also symbolised social status, religious beliefs and ethnic origins. Generally, women’s hair was kept long but worn up. Popular styles featured a central parting with hair curled, braided or twisted atop the head, with loose coils falling either side of the face. Combs and pins crafted from wood, ivory or tortoise shell, often featuring decorative carved elements, kept hair in place. While some women had pearls or ornaments woven into their braided updos for special occasions, others began sporting turban-like wrappings, inspired by eastern traders. Whatever the style, hair was covered with a shoulder-length veil when leaving the home.

©Metropolitan Museum of Art

THE BLUES AND THE GREENS

In Byzantium, sport really was a matter of life and death

Written by Edoardo Albert

It's one of the most famous scenes in movie history. It took five weeks to shoot and a year to prepare. It was filmed on the largest movie set yet constructed. Yet the chariot race in Ben-Hur was only a pale reflection of the drama and spectacle of chariot racing in New Rome: Constantinople.

Games bloody, brutal and violent had been at the heart of the public control exerted by the Roman emperors on the vast, seething hordes of their city. But Constantinople was expressly founded as the Christian capital of a Christian empire: the gladiatorial games and savage public spectacles could have no place there. However, the strategy of 'panem et circenses' had an imperial provenance that stretched back past Juvenal's satires of the 2nd Century: the emperors of New Rome could no more abandon the control of the mob it offered them than could the emperors of Old Rome. In partnership with the Church, the Byzantine emperors provided the 'panem' (bread) through various festivals, most notably the 'Hippodrome of Vegetables', held at the feast to commemorate the founding of the city, when vast quantities of bread, fish and, indeed, vegetables were distributed to the city's poor as part of a programme of what were, in effect, social services providing for the health of the city's poorer inhabitants. But man does not live by bread alone: he requires entertainment, something to raise his mind from the drudgery of the daily toil. And for this, there were the races.

The Hippodrome was the Byzantine version of the Circus Maximus in Rome. Although the Circus Maximus was longer, the Hippodrome was broader, measuring 400 metres (1,300 feet) by 200 metres (650 feet). It could accommodate 100,000 spectators and seat between 40 and 80,000 of them. And what they principally came to watch was chariot racing. The track was U-shaped, with a long, lavishly decorated barrier, the spina, separating the two long straights. There could be no greater indication of the importance of the Hippodrome, and its races, in the life of the empire than the fact that it directly adjoined the Imperial Palace. The emperor and his retinue could access the Kathisma - the imperial box seats in the grandstand overlooking the eastern straight - directly from the palace by going down an enclosed passageway and then up a spiral staircase. And access them they did. Chariot racing was as popular with the imperial family as it was with the general populace. Indeed, in a rigidly stratified society, the races and the passions they engendered were one of the few things that crossed all social barriers.

The races were run by four teams of quadrigae, that is chariots each pulled by a team of four horses. There were four teams, each with its own colour - Red, Green, White and Blue. To determine which place he would take on the starting line, each charioteer drew a lot from a revolving urn before the race. They then took their positions on their quadrigae and raced seven laps around the Hippodrome's circuit.

The typical programme for a day at the races in the 6th Century was for the teams to engage in 25 races with an interval in the middle of the day. Byzantine chariot racing also had a unique feature, the diversium, which allowed the winner of the morning's races to challenge the losing driver to a rematch in the afternoon, but with the teams and chariots swapped over. The idea behind this was that if the morning's winner triumphed again in the diversium, when

The four bronze horses that once presided over the Hippodrome are now on display in Venice

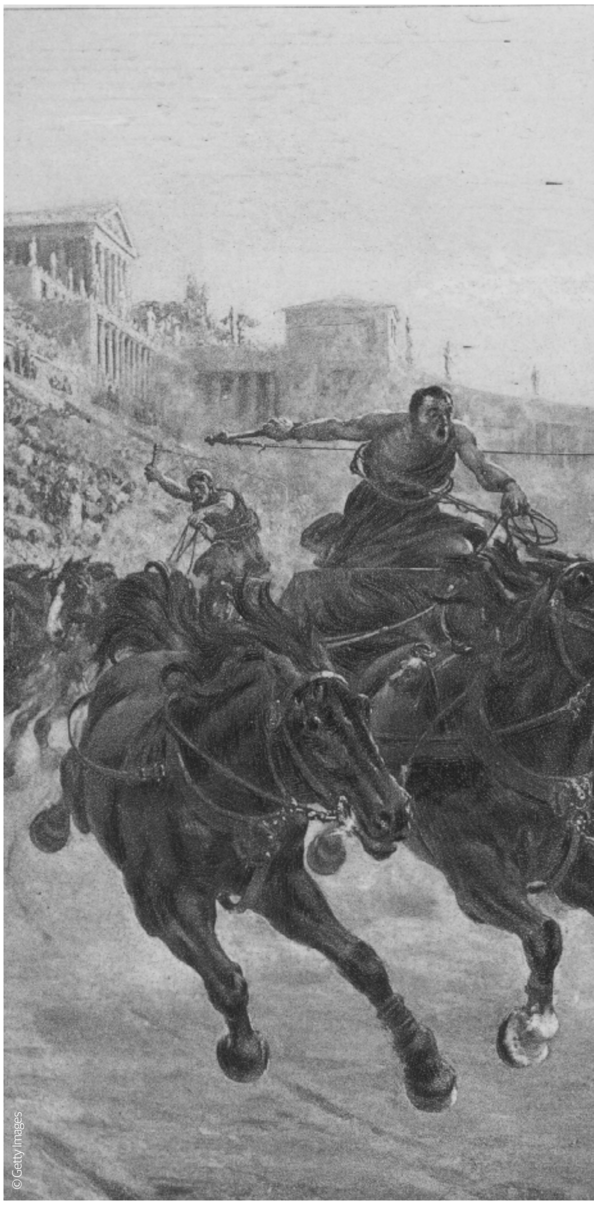
© Tteske / Wikimedia Commons

driving the team of his opponents, he would have proved that the victory was due to his personal skill rather than him having a better team of horses. One of the greatest Byzantine charioteers, named Constantine, achieved a record of 25 morning victories and then 21 afternoon wins using the horses of his defeated opponents. A programme of 50 races in a single day suggests a special festival of chariot racing in honour of one of the sport's greatest competitors, possibly with the length of the races reduced so as not to exhaust the horses.

While the main events featured superstar charioteers such as Constantine, there were also three different grades of competition according to the age of the charioteers: the under 17s, boys between 17 and 20, and adult charioteers. The junior races provided competition experience for apprentice racers as well as giving the Byzantine crowd the chance to spot young talent.

The half-time show was almost as popular as the races. The acts included singers, dancers, clowns and acrobats, and tight-rope walkers making their way across the Hippodrome high above the circuit below. There were also wild-beast shows, but as proof that Christianity had fundamentally altered the blood-soaked nature of imperial games, these were not the gore fests of the colosseum, with men fighting enraged and starving beasts to the death, but rather contests of skill, agility and daring. While it's certainly true that today's animal charities would look askance on the displays in the Hippodrome, the animals usually emerged alive – it was becoming increasingly difficult and expensive to find suitably exotic and dangerous beasts. A typical show would feature a daring performer pole vaulting out of the way of a charging beast. Another crowd favourite would strike a chord with anyone who has seen the gyrosphere scenes in *Jurassic World*. The performer strapped himself into a hollow sphere, called a canisteum, and was rolled into the Hippodrome. There the animals, seeing this strange object, would approach, only for the man inside to tease them by sticking out an arm or a leg. The animal would try to seize the protruding limb, which was quickly pulled back into the sphere, with the effect that the sphere would start to roll. The animals, enraged or curious, would then proceed to bat the sphere, with the man rotating inside it, all round the Hippodrome, to the enjoyment of the watching crowds. So not exactly RSPCA-approved, but a far cry from the brutal shows of the Roman colosseum.

The Hippodrome, the magnificent building in which these sports and entertainments took place, survives today mainly as the great empty space of the Sultanahmet Meydani in Istanbul. The Ottoman conquerors of Constantinople were not interested in the sports staged in the Hippodrome and the building was cannibalised, though the sultans never built on its grounds. Of the many great statues and monuments that once decorated the spina, only three survive, the best preserved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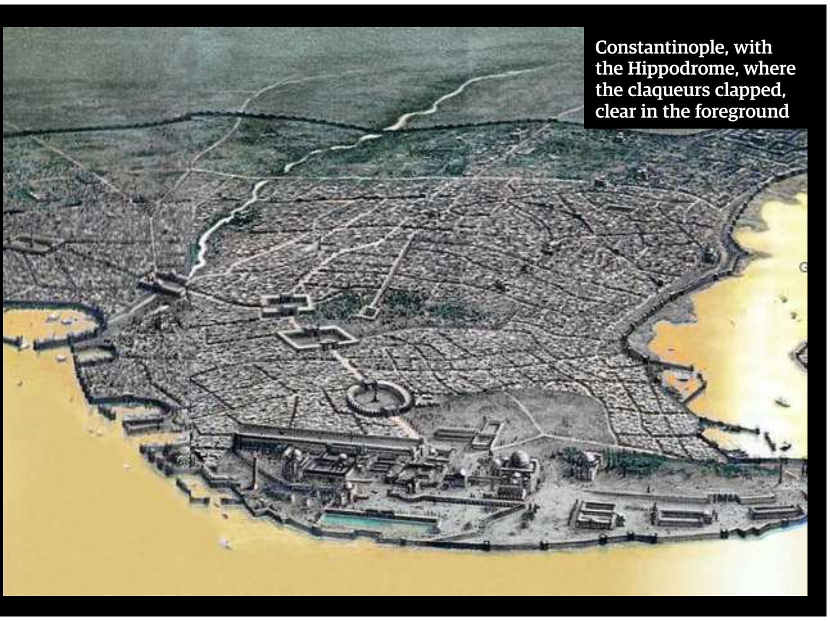
> "The races – and the passions they engendered – were one of the few things that crossed all social barriers"

Kings of the dancefloor

In the 5th Century, pantomime dancing drew crowds as large and enthusiastic as chariot racing. The dance troupes employed professional cheerleaders called claqueurs to orchestrate the audience and its applause. These claqueurs, however, began to apply their skills to political demonstrations, whipping crowds up into frenzies.

In response, the imperial authorities effectively nationalised the claqueurs, bringing them into the guild of public entertainment that was financed by the imperial purse, and assigning them to the colour factions of the chariot racing teams. However, the fervour the claqueurs could engender, when combined with sporting passions, led to a series of riots and disturbances that culminated in the Nika Riots of 532. To stop this recurring, the factions and their claqueurs were made a part of imperial ritual, with the acclamation of a new emperor an important part of the ceremonies associated with his accession to the throne, and the colour factions playing a large part in the ceremonies that accompanied races.

By the 7th Century, the factions had become an accepted part of the imperial government and, as such, far less inclined to riot – after all, they would have only been rioting against themselves. The Blues and the Greens, however, remained an important part of the race-day ritual as long as chariot racing continued in Constantinople.


Constantinople, with the Hippodrome, where the claqueurs clapped, clear in the foreground

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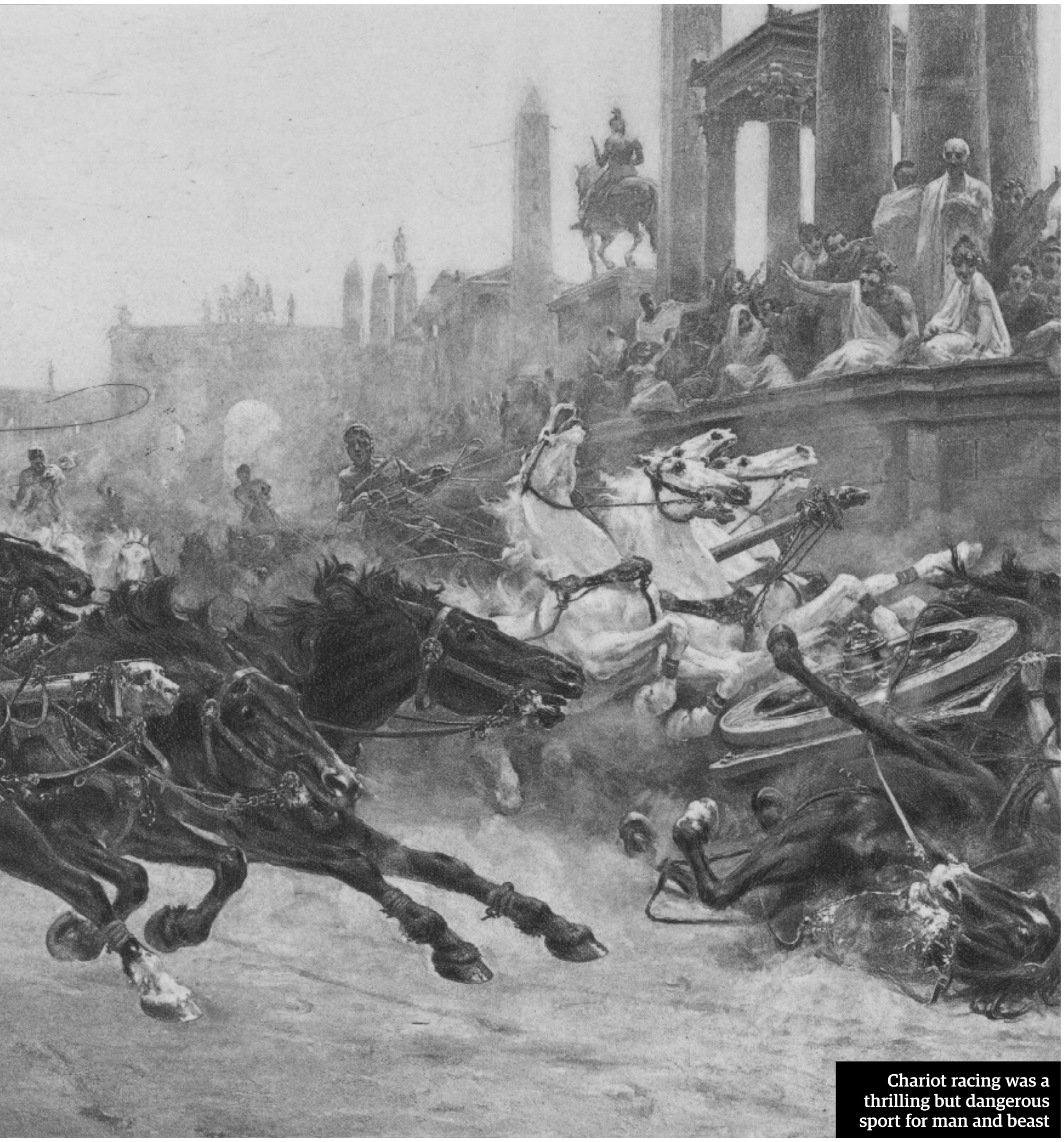
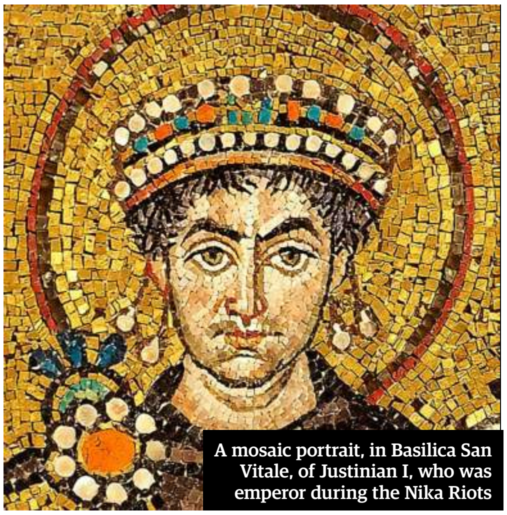


Chariot racing was a thrilling but dangerous sport for man and beast



A mosaic portrait, in Basilica San Vitale, of Justinian I, who was emperor during the Nika Riots

©Wiki Petar Milošević

being the obelisk taken from the Temple of Karnak in Egypt. However, some of the greatest works of art of the Hippodrome did survive, although they owe their survival to being looted by the Venetians during the disastrous turn of the Fourth Crusade, which ended with the Crusaders sacking and conquering Constantinople rather than reclaiming the Holy Land. At the northern end of the circuit, reigning over the track in bronze splendour, were four magnificent horses. The Venetians took the statues and placed them in honour above the façade of San Marco (the horses are now kept inside the basilica to protect them from the elements, with the four above the façade being replicas). But the skill and craftsmanship of Byzantine art is amply conveyed by these magnificent equine statues, as indeed is something of the drama and spectacle of the chariot races themselves.

Race days must have been an extraordinary cacophony of noise and spectacle. Sports fans today often bring musical instruments into the stadium, but the Greens and the Blues did not need to bring instruments in from outside: they had organs, silver organs of the bellows type, actually installed in the Hippodrome in the seating reserved for each faction. However, in contrast to the often scatological and frequently obscene chants of today's football fans, the Blues and the Greens usually sang ethereal hymns in praise of their team. For the races, despite the factionalism of Blue and Green, were an expression of the solidarity of the Empire under its single, divinely appointed ruler, the emperor, chosen by God as his representative on earth.

So, the games routinely began with the emperor making the sign of the cross. As God's viceroy on earth, the emperor was seen as the provider of victory: within the Hippodrome, the winning charioteer's triumph was laid at the feet of the emperor: the victory was his and the winning faction chanted a plea to share in that victory, saying, "We ask for equal share of your victory that comes from God, an equal share of your victory, Master, the faith of the kings prevails."

While chariot racing was the most popular sport of the Byzantine Empire, it was not its only diversion. The nobility, in common with the aristocratic elites of other civilisations of the time, were enthusiastic hunters, ranging after a variety of animals that would have been the envy of the northern nobility: lions, leopards, gazelles, bears, deer, foxes and even hippopotami.

A popular game among the Byzantine elite was polo. Unlike most other sports of the empire, which were inherited from classical antiquity, polo was an import from Persia. It was called tyzkanion - the name in Persian is tschougan - and such was its popularity in the imperial family that Emperor Basil I had a polo pitch made within the Imperial Palace. The form of polo played in Byzantium, however, was different to the modern game. Rather than riders hitting a ball with a mallet, the players carried poles with a net at the end into which they scooped the ball before hurling it towards the opposition end: a sort of riders' version of lacrosse. There was also a foot version of tyzkanion that, some historians have suggested, was the forerunner of modern-day lacrosse, having reached France via Crusaders passing through Constantinople on their way to and from the Holy Land, who took the horseback version of polo back to France, changing its name to chicane.

As for the most famous of ancient games, the Olympics, historians used to trace the ending of the tournament in its original form to Christian intolerance of pagan festivals. However, it's now clear that rather than being banned by imperial decree, the games faded away into obscurity and irrelevance, as a result of the culture that had produced and sustained them no longer existing. What is true of the sports of Byzantium, pre-eminently chariot racing, is that they carried through into the medieval era a sports tradition that had begun in antiquity. The chariot races of the Hippodrome were in most respects the same as those of the Circus Maximus, the last iteration of a sport that had lasted for more than a thousand years. In comparison, modern-day team sports are young indeed, with histories that stretch back a couple of hundred years at most.

Day in the life

CHARIOT RACER

CHARIOT RACERS DREAMED OF GLORY AND SUCCESS IN THE HIPPODROME

BYZANTINE EMPIRE, 500-42

Chariot racing was the most popular spectator sport in the Byzantine Empire. Races took place in Constantinople's Hippodrome circus, which could seat up to 100,000 people at once. Spectators from all classes, including the emperor, enjoyed the games as a distraction from their daily life while the racers themselves were normally slaves. The racers were divided into four team, which inspired the same fierce loyalty as modern football teams. In fact, fans of rival teams often brawled in the aisles. The races were also a prime opportunity for the emperor to present himself to the public, something that otherwise rarely occurred.

PRE-GAME SHOW

As the racers arrived to prepare for a day of competing, a wide array of entertainments were put on for the spectators to enjoy like wrestling, dancing, juggling, tightrope walks and wild beast fights. The emperor and his consort would be seated in their booth, called a Kathisma, which was directly linked to the Great Palace.

REPRESENT THE TEAM

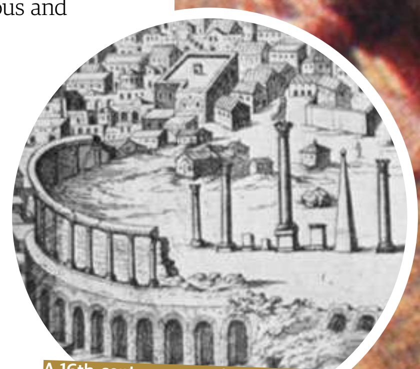
There were four factions that raced in the Hippodrome – Blue, Green, Red and White. Racers would wear tunics that sported the colour of their team so that the crowd could easily identify them. Out of the four, it was the Blue and Green teams that were the most prominent, with the Red and White teams seen as the secondary factions.

BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

Chariot races were extremely dangerous and racers needed to wear protective gear. Leather pads for the thighs and chest were common along with leather helmets. A sharp knife was also a must in case the chariot's reigns became entangled and the racer needed to cut himself free.

PLAY FAIR

Lots were drawn to determine which of the 12 starting gates, known as carceres, the racers would go from.



A 16th-century engraving of the ruins of the Hippodrome, showing the remains of the chariot racing circuit

The spina was adorned with monuments such as the Obelisk of Thutmose III. Emperor Theodosius I moved it to the Hippodrome from Egypt in 390 CE

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CHARIOT RACER

The gates were mechanised to ensure that they would all open at the same time. The four horse chariots were readied and brought to the gates and each team usually had two chariots participating in every race.

READY, SET, GO

A wealthy sponsor for the chariots, such as a senator or even the emperor, would drop a white cloth to signal the beginning of the race. The charioteers would have to ride to the end of the U-shaped track, wheel around the spina in the centre and back again to win. Each race required seven laps and lasted around 15 minutes.

LUNCHTIME

There was a break midway through the day for food and drink, with more entertainment brought out for the spectators in the meantime. It was also an opportunity for the racers to recuperate and ready themselves for the afternoon. This was not just about victory – success in the Hippodrome could propel racers to stardom.

IN IT TO WIN IT

After lunch, the races would continue with up to 24 performed each day. A moveable scoreboard, which had seven dolphin- or egg-shaped lap counters, kept track of the score. Racers would team up to get rid of the first-place racer, usually by knocking into their carriage – an extremely dangerous and deadly move.

WANT A REMATCH?

Unique to Byzantine chariot racing was the honour of the 'diversium', which allowed the winner to challenge the loser to a rematch with swapped chariots and horses. It was an opportunity for the victor to prove to the crowd that they had won the races based on skill, rather than luck.

COLLECT THE PRIZE

The winning chariot racer received their prize from the emperor, which consisted of a gold seal, a tunic, a helmet and a silk belt. The racer's victory was ultimately the emperor's and during the prize ceremony the crowd would shout their allegiance to him. For the racer, winning gave him the chance to switch teams and increase his income.

TIME TO PARTY

After the day's events, the factions celebrated or commiserated. There was frequent conflict among the different teams and supporters since chariot racing promoted a mob-like mentality, not too dissimilar to football hooliganism seen today. For this reason the scholar Procopius declared the racing factions "a sickness of the soul."

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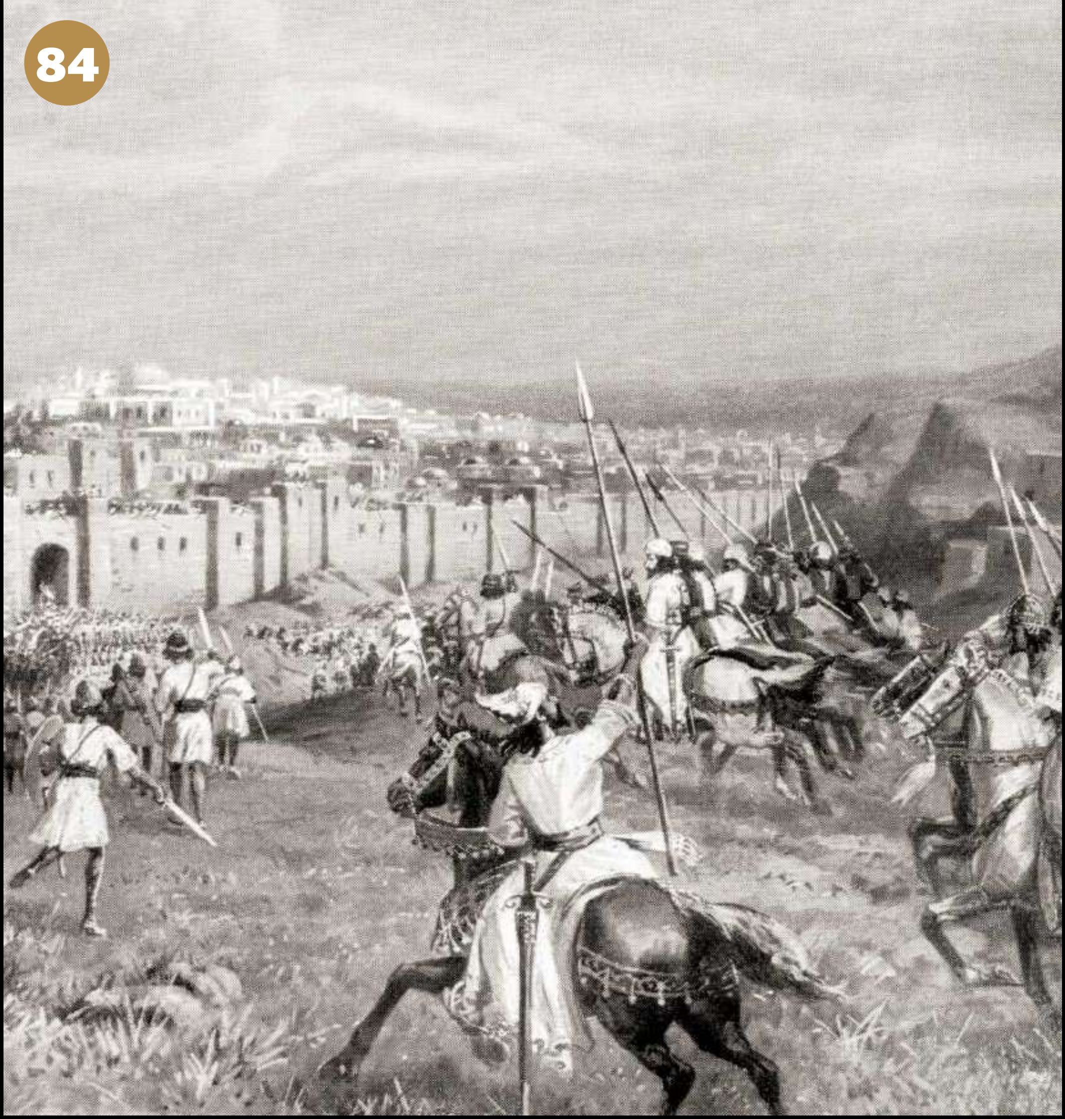


WARFARE

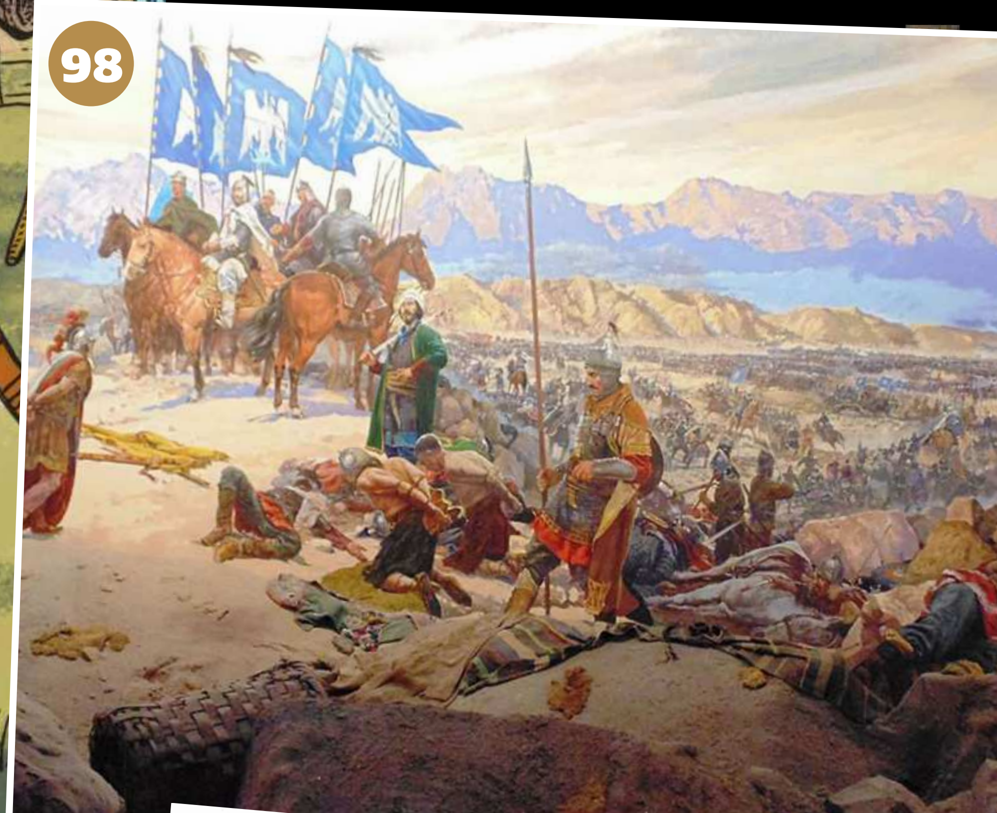
84 FIRST SIEGE OF CONSTANTINOPLE
After the Muslim conquest of the Sassanid Empire, the fate of Europe lay in the hands of Constantinople

88 WIN A WAR WITH GREEK FIRE
Defend the Byzantine capital by searing enemy ships with this fearsome incendiary to burn your way to victory

90 THE EMPEROR'S NORTHMEN
The extraordinary story of how Vikings became the bodyguards of the emperors of Byzantium

98 THE BATTLE OF MANZIKERT
The ferocious battle that meant the beginning of the end for the Byzantine Empire

88


98

THE FIRST SIEGE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

After the rapid Muslim conquest of the Sassanid Empire, the fate of Europe lay in the hands of Constantinople

Written by Hareth Al Bustani

The 7th Century was a difficult time for the Byzantines. After a long spell of plague and disaster, the despot Phocas ended centuries of peaceful successions of power, before himself being violently overthrown by the Heraclian dynasty. Smelling blood, the Sassanid Persians launched a decades-long war, exhausting the two empires to breaking point. As fate would have it, this would be the last of the Roman-Persian wars, for no sooner had peace returned in 628CE, a far deadlier threat emerged from the unlikeliest of foes.

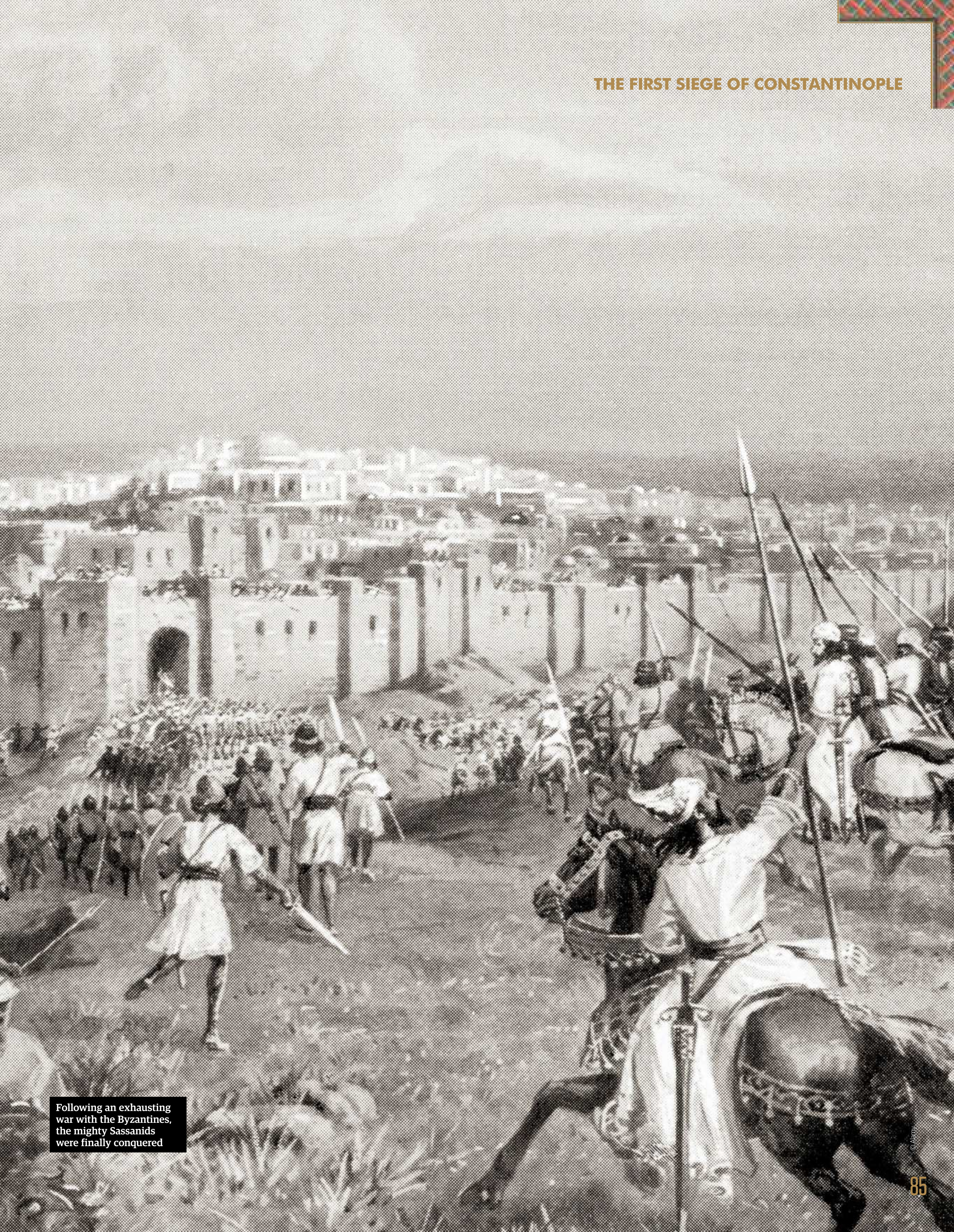
To the south, within just a generation, utilising light cavalry and strategic brilliance, the spritely Muslim armies conquered Persia, Syria and Egypt - pushing the Byzantines deep into Anatolia and taking three of their wealthiest regions, including the cities of Alexandria and Antioch. Under the leadership of the Syrian governor Mu'awiya, the Muslims went unchecked, advancing Islam ever closer to the gates of Christendom itself - Constantinople. In 651, having subjugated the Sassanid Empire, the Arabs shifted the bulk of their army westwards, building a fleet of 1,700 ships in Syria and Egypt. Despite a clear advantage on land, any extended campaign to take the legendary Byzantine capital would have to be supported by sea. Testing the waters, they faced little resistance, conquering Cyprus, raiding Kos and Crete and even melting down the Colossus of Rhodes, while invading Armenia to the east.

With the wind behind his sails, Mu'awiya settled in Phoenicia, in modern Lebanon, to prepare for the ultimate expedition - the siege of Constantinople. To the emerging Muslim empire, there was no greater ambition. Conquering the Byzantine capital would not only hand the Arabs the very heartland of Roman might and prestige, but open up all of Europe for conquest. The Muslims, however, suffered a setback when two Christians, the sons of a trumpeter, released all the local Roman prisoners, burned equipment and sailed off back home. Furious, in 654 the Arabs set sail for Phoenix, off the Mediterranean coast of modern Antalya - where they were received by a Byzantine fleet.

Though the Muslims had little experience in open sea combat, they had studied their enemy well. Both sides drew up their lines, with hundreds of ships in tight formations, and the Muslims lashed their vessels together. The Byzantines, led by Emperor Constans II himself, seized the initiative, leaping onto the Arab ships, and engaging in vicious, hand-to-hand combat. As the Muslims gained the upper hand, however, Constans realised all was lost and hurled himself off his ship - amidst the clashing of swords and screams - almost drowning in a sea dyed red with Roman blood. It was the first Muslim victory on the open seas, and a spectacular one at that. It seemed nothing could stand between the Arabs - now masters of land and sea - and Constantinople. In their wake, all of Anatolia buckled, from the mountains to the plains, just as Syria and Egypt had done before.

Having laid waste to Asia Minor, Mu'awiya prepared to launch a final assault on the walls of Constantinople itself. However, when a vicious storm stopped his fleet in its tracks, it seemed to the Christians that God himself had delivered them from the Muslim wrath. Soon after, the caliph Uthman, Mu'awiya's kinsman, was murdered, sparking five years of civil war. After that reprieve, however, the Muslim world returned reunited and stronger than ever, behind the daring Mu'awiya and his mighty Umayyad dynasty.

The new caliph immediately sent warriors into Romania and Armenia, and rapidly subjugated



Following an exhausting war with the Byzantines, the mighty Sassanids were finally conquered

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> “An architect called Callinicus claimed to have invented a secret weapon – a substance that would burn, even on water”

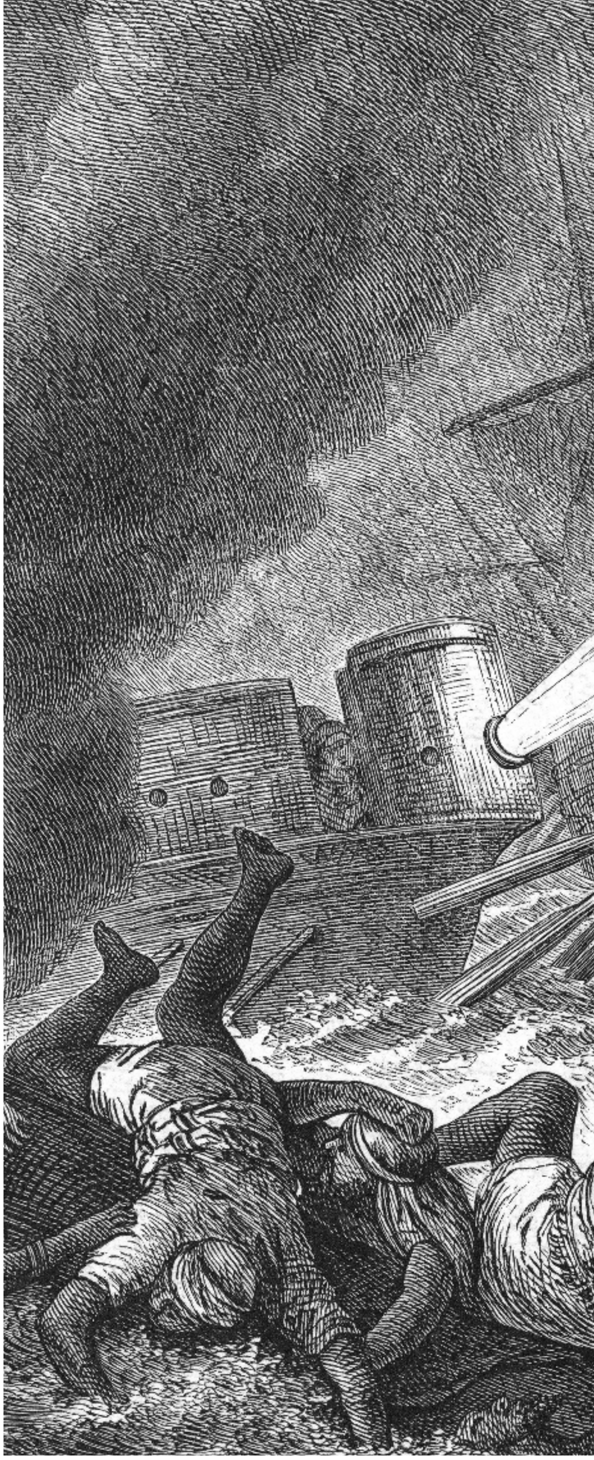
Albania and Media. While he rebuilt his fleet, his men continuously raided forts and cities across Asia Minor, virtually within reach of Constantinople. This dealt the Byzantines a crushing economic blow, leaving huge swaths of land depopulated. As the acclaimed general Saborios defected to the Muslim cause, the paranoid Byzantine Emperor Constans killed his brother and fled from Constantinople to Syracuse, in Sicily – leaving the capital to its own devices. To escape the wrath of the Arabs, and his own men, he entertained the delusion of moving his capital to Rome, giving Mu'awiya free license to plunder Anatolia.

Unable to muster enough forces for a counter-attack, the soldiers of Constantinople instead shored up their defences – enough to break another brief siege by Mu'awiya's son Yazid. For his various sins, Constans was bludgeoned to death with a bucket in the bath, in 668, and replaced by his abler son, Constantine IV. Unlike his father, Constantine had no intention of leaving Constantinople to the Arabs. However, there was a storm coming. Having prepared another great fleet, in 670 they campaigned in Cyzicus, 60 miles away, before settling in Cilicia and Lycia for the winter. With no time to waste, Constantine began making preparations of his own.

Though the odds were mounted against him, a lifeline came in the form of a Syrian refugee, an architect called Callinicus, who claimed to have invented a secret weapon – a substance that would burn, even on water. Thrilled, Constantine mass produced this 'Greek Fire', loading it onto a fleet of double-decker ships, with siphons fixed atop, at the mouth of the Sea of Marmara.

In 673, a great rainbow was said to have appeared in the night sky. “All mankind shuddered” and “everyone said it was the end of the world,” wrote Theophanes. It very may well have been for, as spring broke, Mu'awiya launched an enormous assault, the great siege that he had been preparing for his entire life. His men raided their way down the Bosphorus, before landing in the suburbs of Hebdomon and Kyklobion, on the western bank of the Sea of Marmara, a mile from the city. Wave after wave of Muslim solders piled against the capital's southernmost Golden Gate, battling daily from dawn until dusk. As the Byzantine soldiers hunkered down, the bloody dance of war weaved to and fro, from the suburbs to the gate and back again. Occasionally, brave Byzantines embarked on suicidal sorties, drawing the Muslims within range of the catapults atop the city walls.

That autumn, after two long seasons of attrition, the Muslims slogged back to Cyzicus, on the opposite side of Marmara, to rest for the winter. Launching another attack the next spring, they continued this cycle for four long years, hoping to wear down the Byzantines for a final onslaught. In 678, as the Muslims approached once again, Constantine decided to take the fight to the invaders. The emperor led an enormous fleet to the Arabs, and just as at the Battle of Phoenix, both sides drew up their lines, followed by a long,



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The rise of Islam

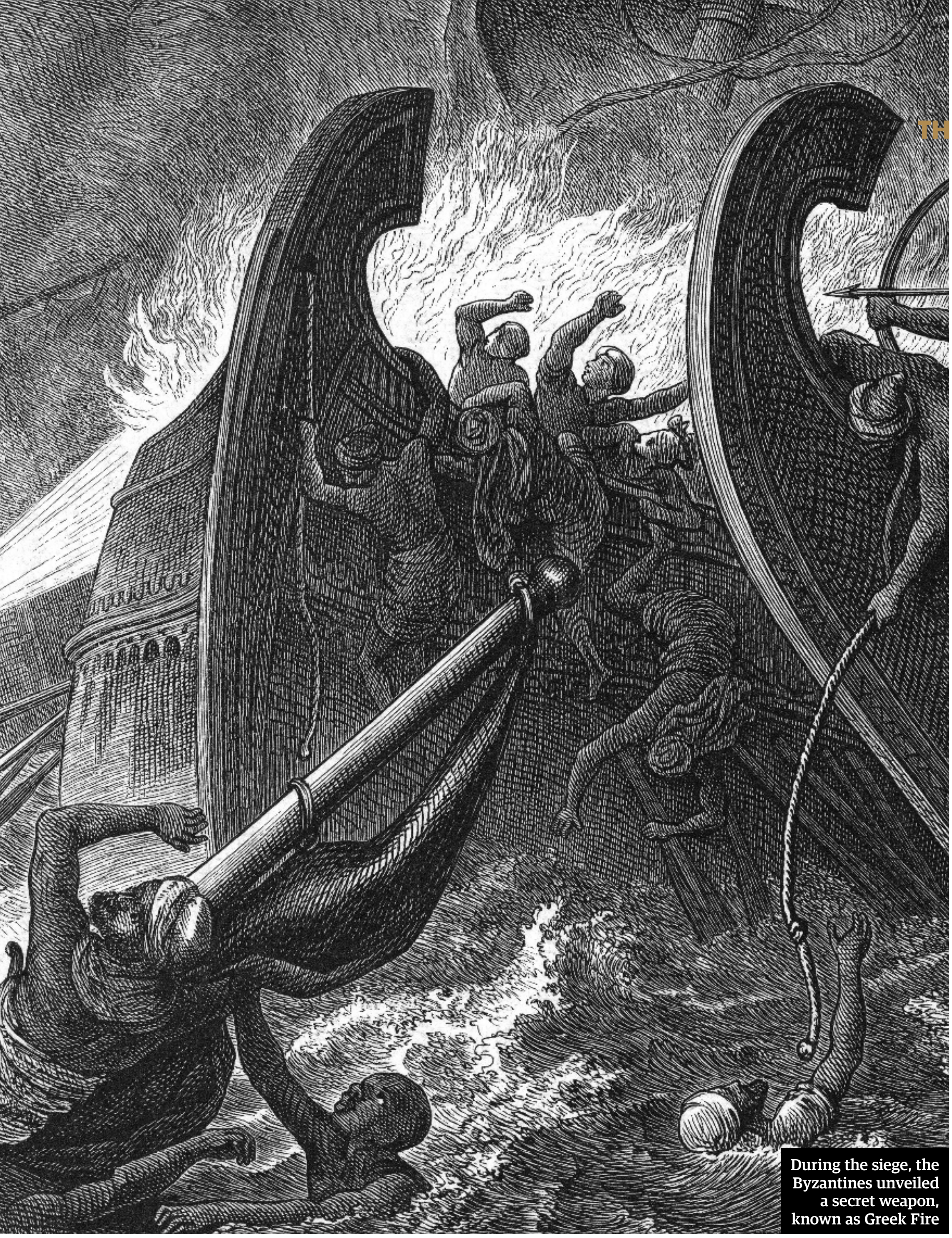
Mohammed was born in around 570CE, a member of the dominant Meccan merchant tribe, the Quraysh. Mecca was a hub of polytheism, and idol worship – home to the prominent pagan shrine, the Kaaba. At the age of 40, Mohammed began having religious experiences, and started preaching a new monotheistic faith to the Meccans – quickly amassing followers, but enduring increasing persecution. After establishing an autonomous Muslim community in Medina, an event known as the Hijra, he scored a series of brilliant military victories over the Meccans, before taking Mecca and uniting the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula.

When he died in 632, his companion Abu Bakr was nominated leader of the realm, the caliph. Having re-affirmed his rule in Arabia, Abu Bakr launched simultaneous blitzkrieg campaigns into Byzantine Syria and Sassanid Mesopotamia, spearheaded by the ingenious general Khalid ibn al-Walid. After a masterstroke at the Battle of Walaja, where Khalid executed a daring double envelopment manoeuvre against a Sassanid army twice his size, he was ordered into Syria. To save time, he marched 500 men 310 miles across the desert.

In the Levant, despite no knowledge of siege warfare, he conquered Damascus. Though the Byzantines considered the Arabs a ragtag bunch, they were handed a stark reality check in 636, at the Battle of Yarmouk, where Khalid's 24,000 lightly armoured men defeated 40,000 heavily armoured Byzantine soldiers – opening up the path to Constantinople.

Within decades, Islam rose from being an oppressed community in Medina to one of the world's pre-eminent empires

© Alamy



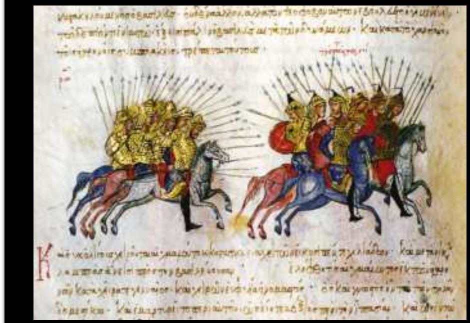
During the siege, the Byzantines unveiled a secret weapon, known as Greek Fire

Byzantine and Arab armies

The Byzantines boasted a well-equipped, highly organised army of 110,000 men, with a rich military tradition. Armies were centred around heavy cavalry, consisting of ranged and melee units. Soldiers dripped in heavy chain, plate and scale armour, with even their horses clad in iron. They wielded mass-produced spears, maces, swords and shields, used to engage the enemy in intense combat – enabling cavalrymen, trained with both the lance and bow, to outflank them.

Meanwhile, with no formalised salary in place, Arab warriors were motivated by religious zeal, or else the plunder of war. Much of their weaponry and armour was looted from the battlefield. They dressed light, with two mail hauberks, some wearing Iraqi bronze, teardrop-style helmets, others just turbans. Armies were centred around an elite cavalry vanguard, with two cavalry wings and an infantry core.

Foot soldiers wielded short swords, spears and shields, used to protect archers, who in turn kept enemy cavalry at bay, using the Hijaz longbow, made of a basic wooden stave. This allowed the army to use its own cavalry to frustrate the enemy; attacking, retreating and counter-attacking, before launching a decisive outflanking manoeuvre. Riders used lances to break lines, impaling enemies and sending them fleeing. Due to a lack of horses, soldiers walked their horses to the battlefield, and only used them for key manoeuvres – otherwise relying on camels, with a wood-framed saddle fixed atop the hump.



© Alamy

Arab and Byzantine armies were centred around cavalry, but the lighter Muslim units boasted greater mobility

uneasy silence. This time, instead of mounting the Muslim vessels, they launched a surprise barrage – spewing forth their elusive Greek Fire, an almighty storm of magma rained down upon the wooden vessels. The flames tore through the Arab fleet and soldiers hurled themselves burning into the sea, crackling and screaming, to little respite.

The secret weapon was an overwhelming success, devastating enough to send the Muslims fleeing. With a twist of fate, the Arab fleet was further buffeted by a great storm, dashed against the rocks in Syllaion – virtually wiping out what remained. Seizing a desperate, rare opportunity to counter-attack, the Byzantines caught the frazzled Muslims besieging Lycia. After a decisive engagement killed 30,000 Arab soldiers, for the first time in half a century, it appeared the Muslim chariot of war was not so infallible after all.

With the Arabs reeling in shock, the Byzantines pressed on, sailing to Tyre and Sidon, and chasing them back, into the mountains of Lebanon. Constantine took the land between Galilee and the Black Mountain, sending Mardaite raiders to harass the Arabs. As a mighty earthquake rocked Mesopotamia, ravaging the city of Edessa, the Arab steamroller was finally put to a stop. Mu'awiya signed a truce that gave the Byzantines 216,000 nomismata, 50 slaves and 50 horses a year, and allowed the Arabs to keep Rhodes. The next year, after two decades as governor of Syria, and another two as caliph, he died, succeeded by his son, Yazid. Despite vastly expanding and empowering the realm, he had reached too far, devoting the financial and military might of the entire Muslim world to the conquest of Constantinople, only to fail in dramatic fashion. Constantine, meanwhile, had revealed the mortality of Christianity's arch-enemy, proving that even the unmitigated breaker of empires could not break the legacy of Rome.

As another Muslim civil war broke out, Constantine seized on the chaos, sacking the Syrian coast. When the Umayyad world was re-united by Abd al-Malik in 685, Constantine finally agreed to a permanent ceasefire on his deathbed. For 10 years, the Arabs would give the Byzantines 1,000 gold coins, a horse and a slave every day, and in return the Mardaites would withdraw from Lebanon – with the two powers sharing tax revenue collected in Cyprus. Constantine's son, Justinian II, would later break the treaty, to disastrous effect, paving the way for yet another siege, once the Muslims had finished licking their wounds. However, the psychological playing field had been levelled – the Byzantines would not roll over, as the Sassanids had, nor would Constantinople.

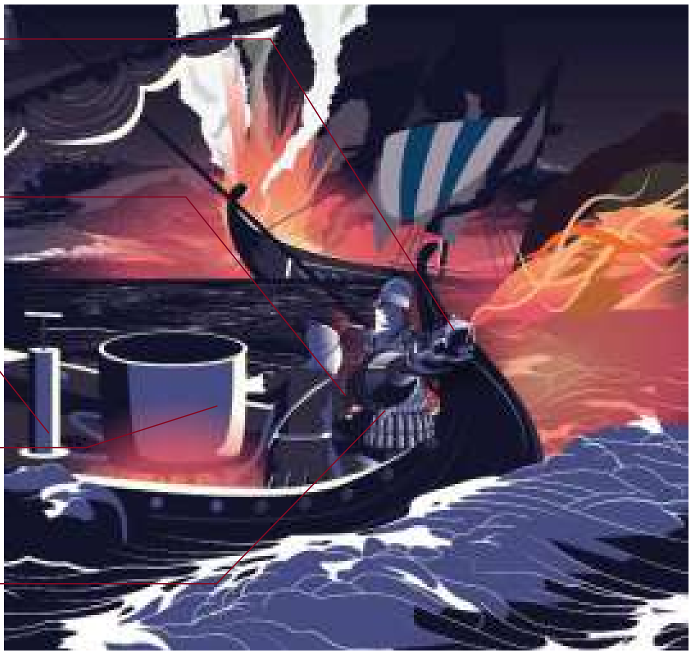
HOW TO WIN A WAR WITH GREEK FIRE

Defend the Byzantine capital by searing enemy ships with this fearsome incendiary to burn your way to victory

CONSTANTINOPLE, 73-1453

Greek fire was the most feared weapon in Medieval warfare. An incendiary chemical, it would set fire spontaneously, stick to wood and flesh, and couldn't be extinguished by water. While pitch and oil-soaked projectiles were used extensively in the Middle Ages, Greek fire was the sole preserve of the Byzantine Empire, its composition a closely guarded secret.

It's thought to have been invented in the 7th century by Jewish refugee Kallinikos of Heliopolis. Thrown in pots or pumped through tubes, it helped repulse many sieges on Constantinople. In fact, its deadliness has been cited as the reason for the empire's long reign.



Dragon head

How do you make such a terrifying weapon even more frightening? Have it be spewed forth from the head of a mythical beast, of course, or at least from behind the protection of a metal shield.

Fuse

The substance is no good unless it's on fire. A fuse at the end of the nozzle will ignite it as it's launched.

Pump

The trigger of the flamethrower is a pump that you will need to push up and down, propelling the Greek fire out in bursts.

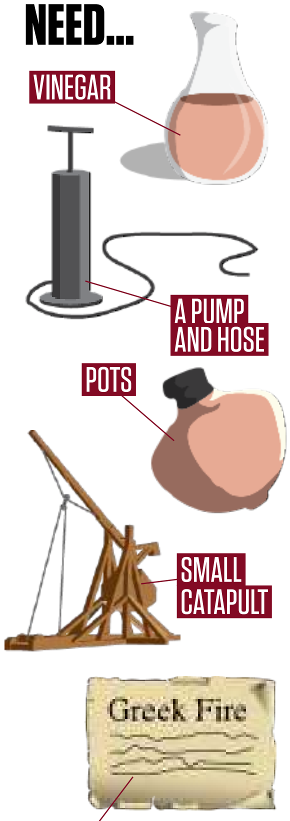
Cauldron

The heated metal container where the lethal substance is kept, ready to be sprayed out in an inferno onto the Byzantines' enemies.

Bronze nozzle

An adjustable mouthpiece with which to direct the Greek fire onto the ships and soldiers of enemy forces.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED...



01 SAFETY CHECK

When the weapon you're using is the Dark Age equivalent of a napalm payload, it's probably best to do a health and safety check. The best practice is to wear leather clothes doused in vinegar or, if you're really desperate, some old urine. Do the same to whatever surface you're stood on and make sure there's a bucket of sand at hand just in case things go awry.

02 SET A TRAP

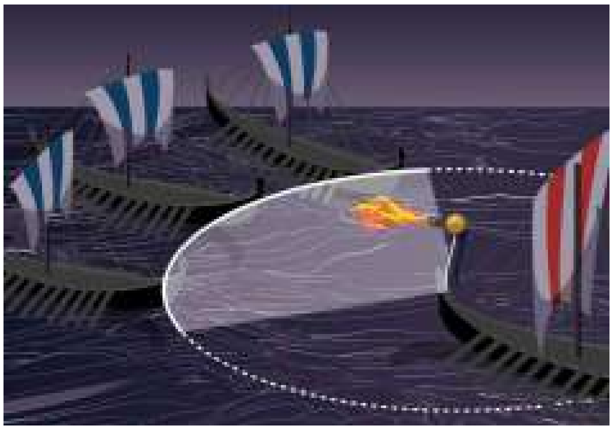
One of the downsides of Greek fire is that it only has a range of about six metres, so we'll need to draw in the enemy fleet in order to give them the full effect of our homemade secret recipe. Fitting flame-throwing hoses to the fore and aft of 15 old ships should be enough to tempt 1,000 Rus ships, shouldn't it?

How not to… win with Greek fire

While the threat of Greek fire itself was a deterrent to most invading forces, it struck little fear in the hearts of the Ottomans in 1453 as it hadn't been used in centuries. In fact, the Ottoman Empire managed to conquer Constantinople once and for all, renaming it Istanbul and using it as their own capital.

Though the Ottomans had developed their own version of Greek fire, the successful siege condemned not only the Byzantine Empire but also the secret of its most feared weapon to the history books.

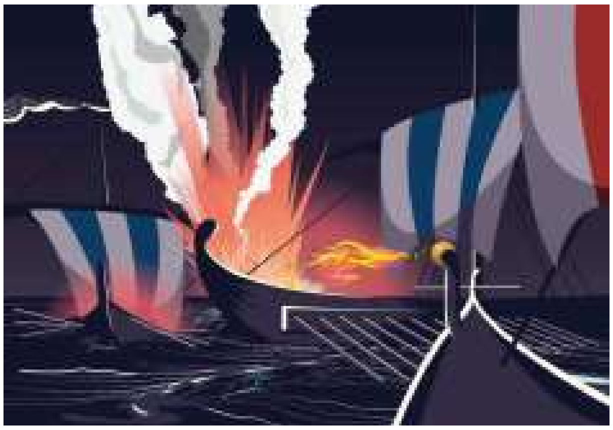
To this day, its exact composition remains a mystery to the world. Although the recipe was passed down from emperor to emperor throughout the Byzantine Empire, it was never written down lest it fall into enemy hands and be used against them in battle.



03

ALL HANDS TO THE PUMPS

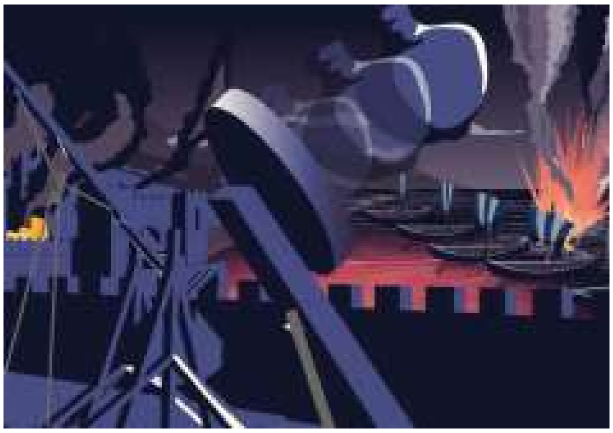
Don't let the hard work of the surprise be ruined. Though it's a pretty daunting site, let the Rus' ships come in as close as possible. Then, when they're near enough to hear their premature victorious calls, press down on those pumps and let them have a taste. It also makes a savage noise and plumes of black smoke to add to the terror.



04

NO NEED FOR ACCURACY

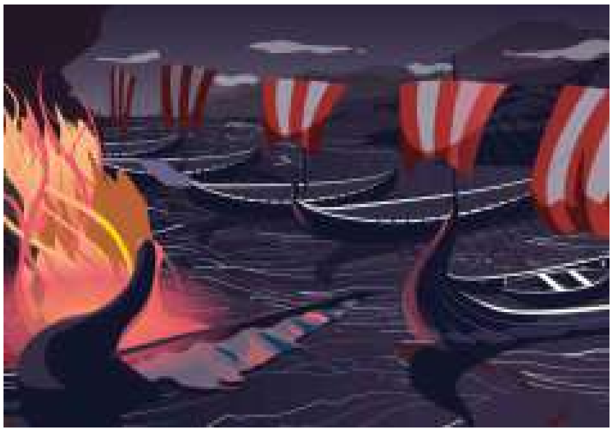
Obviously it's best to aim for the ships that should catch fire pretty quickly and it will only get worse for the panicked crew when they try in vain to put it out with water. You needn't worry if some goes in the sea – it'll still burn and make sure those who abandon their ships get a good roasting while they try to swim away.



05

LET OTHERS JOIN IN

Some of the enemy will try and escape the inferno, so make sure you give the men on the seaward ramparts the opportunity to have some fun. Even if you don't have enough hoses, small jars filled with Greek fire with a nice burning wick will make a vicious Medieval Molotov cocktail for them to throw or launch via a catapult.

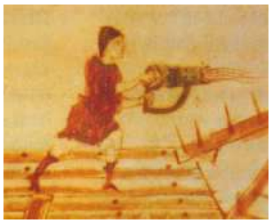


06

OLD-FASHIONED WARFARE

Though Greek fire is an unrivalled weapon, its range and limited supply means it can only inflict so much damage and fear. With the enemy in disarray, it's up to the rest of the army and navy to capitalise and finish off the invaders. Any who escape can help spread the news that the emperor and his secret weapon are not to be messed with.

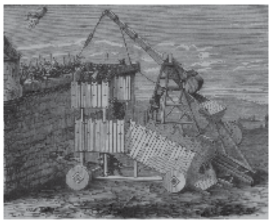
4 FAMOUS… TIMES GREEK FIRE WAS USED



SIEGE OF THE CAPITAL

678

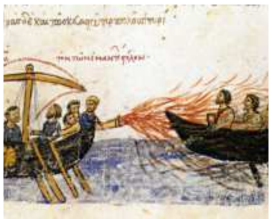
The besieging forces of the Umayyad Caliphate were the first to experience Greek fire when their navy was set ablaze.



ARABIAN ATTACK

718

Despite a relentless invasion from Arab forces, Emperor Leo III's navy were victorious thanks to Greek fire.



THOMAS THE SLAV

822

Both sides had Greek fire at their disposal but it was the Emperor Michael II who used it best during the revolt of Thomas the Slav.

WAR WITH THE RUS

941

Emperor Romanus I Lecapenus successfully defeated the invading Russian fleet at sea with his favourite fiery weapon.

© Ed Crooks

THE EMPEROR'S NORTHMEN

The extraordinary story of how Vikings became the bodyguards of the emperors of Byzantium

Written by Edoardo Albert

To Basil II, Emperor of Byzantium, it must have seemed that he would never rule the empire of which he'd had nominal charge since he was five. He had survived, as emperor-in-name alone, a childhood dominated by successive generals turned emperors, only to assume the imperial purple in his twenties to face rebellion on all sides and treachery in his capital, Constantinople.

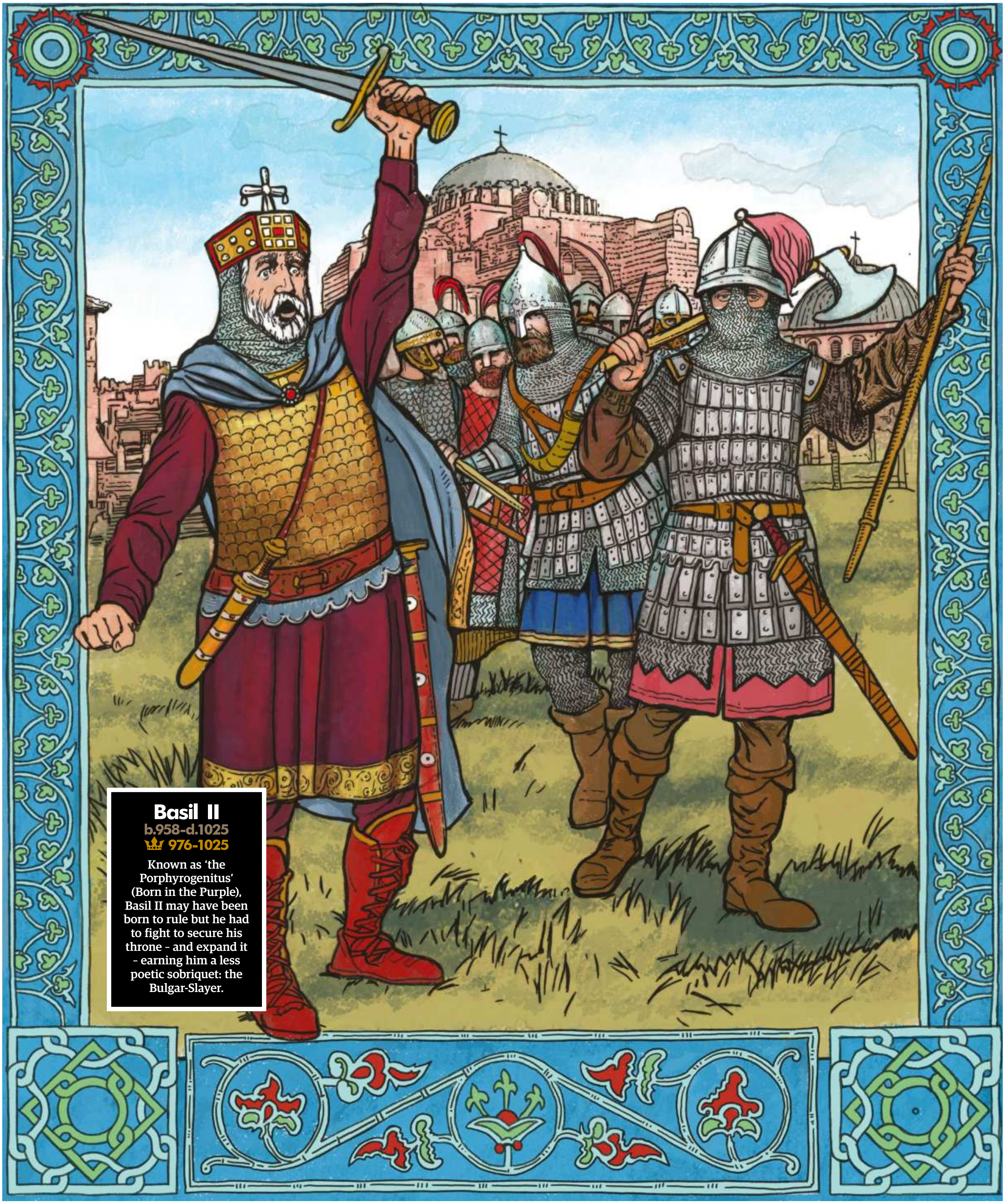
But Basil had survived, removing the great uncle who had ruled in his name and turning the rebel generals against each other. However, now his enemies were camped on the eastern shore of the straits of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, stopping reinforcements arriving from the military heartlands of the Byzantine Empire in Anatolia (which lies within today's Turkey). That was assuming any reinforcements would come from Anatolia. The rebel general, Bardas Phokas, had marched through Anatolia on his way to lay siege to Constantinople, gathering common soldiers and Anatolian barons alike to his cause. If Basil was to survive, he was going to have to look elsewhere for help.

So far, Basil's only military expedition - an attack on Tsar Samuel, leader of the Bulgars - had been a complete disaster, mitigated only by the fact that he had escaped with his life. But one thing Basil would never lack during his long reign of 49 years was self-belief. While in this he was typical of the type of men who reign as emperors, Basil was in other ways, completely atypical among men who wield absolute power. Firstly, and most notably, he never married. In an age when securing the succession for your children was paramount, Basil's decision not to marry is truly extraordinary. It seems to stem from his decision to devote himself, solely and entirely, to the service of the Byzantine empire. For along with sexual abstinence, he also practised physical abstinences, fasting frequently and cutting a figure that, to his subjects, seemed sadly lacking in imperial dash. One chronicler complained that, "His neck was unadorned by collars, his head by diadems. He refused to make himself conspicuous in purple-coloured cloaks and he put away superfluous rings, even clothes of different colours."

If Basil scorned the trappings of sovereignty, he was as thorough as possible in learning the levers of power, setting out to master all the details of statecraft, from taxation to the finer points of siege warfare.

Indeed, the only likeness to the man he approached for help was in their common mastery of horse riding. For, with the rebels entrenched around Constantinople, Basil sent word to Vladimir, Grand Prince of Kiev, asking for him to honour the pledge his father had made to the emperors of Byzantium and come to his aid.

Two more dissimilar rulers it would be hard to imagine. Where Basil was abstemious, Vladimir was notorious for his sexual appetite, keeping four wives and 800 concubines while still cutting a swathe through the wives and daughters of his kingdom.



Basil II

b.958-d.1025

976-1025

Known as 'the Porphyrogenitus' (Born in the Purple), Basil II may have been born to rule but he had to fight to secure his throne – and expand it – earning him a less poetic sobriquet: the Bulgar-Slayer.

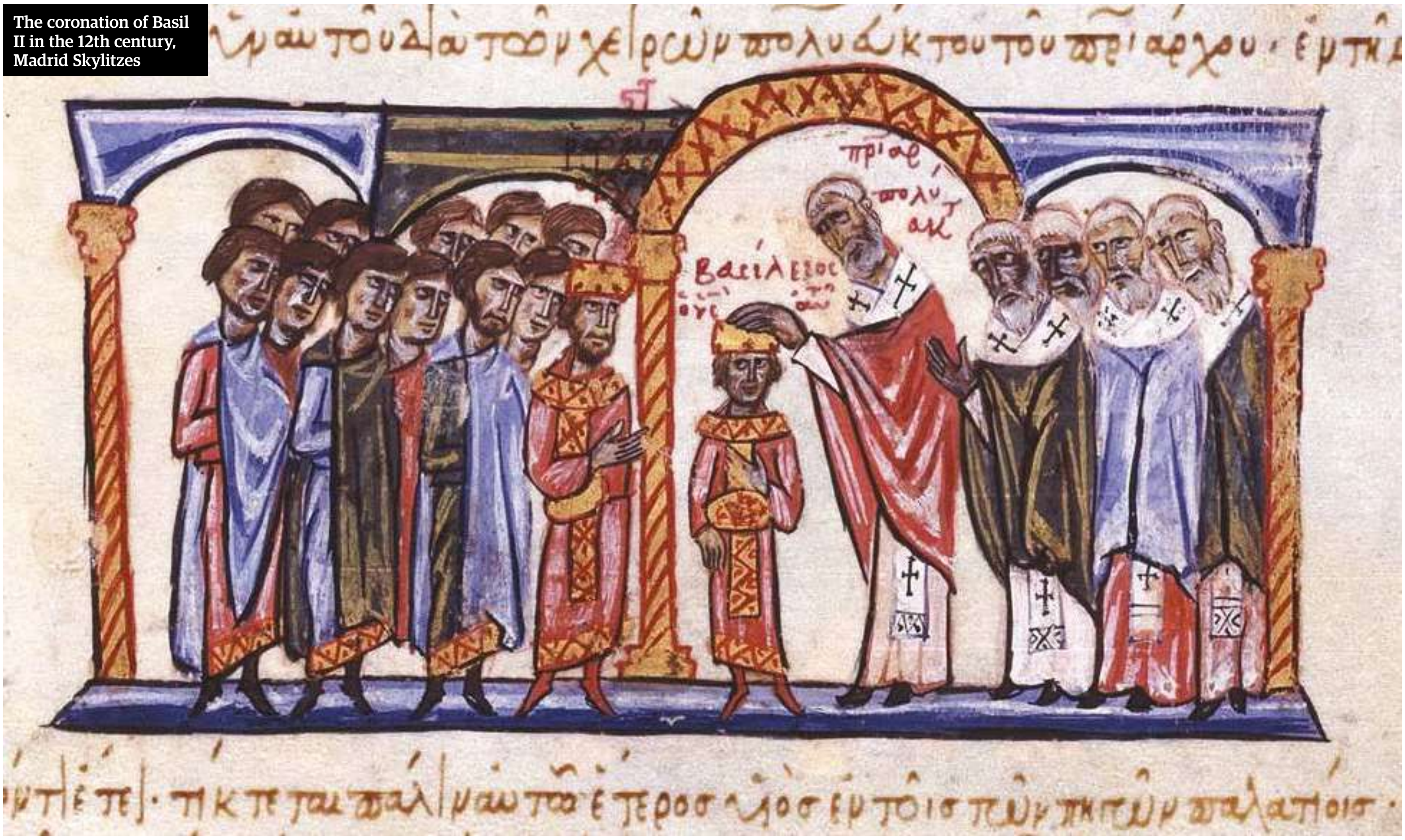
> "However, despite all precedent, Basil was willing to lay down his sister for the sake of the empire - and his own continued rule"

So it was a bit of a shock, although perhaps not a surprise, when Vladimir replied to Basil saying that the price of his support would be Basil's sister, Anna, in marriage. What made the proposal even worse was that Vladimir was a pagan, and an enthusiastic one to boot. Never before had a princess of the imperial family married a barbarian; even the greatest kings of western Europe, up to and including Charlemagne, had been summarily rebuffed when they had intimated a willingness to marry into the imperial family. For the emperors of Byzantium saw themselves as the descendants of the emperors of Rome and, indeed, the empire's chroniclers always refer to Byzantium as Rome. Thus any European king, descendants of barbarians all, would seem a complete mismatch from the perspective of emperors who had been civilised when the marriage suitor's ancestors were still worshipping sticks and stones and picking nits from their beards. To entertain the possibility of Anna marrying a pagan warlord was surely beyond the pale.

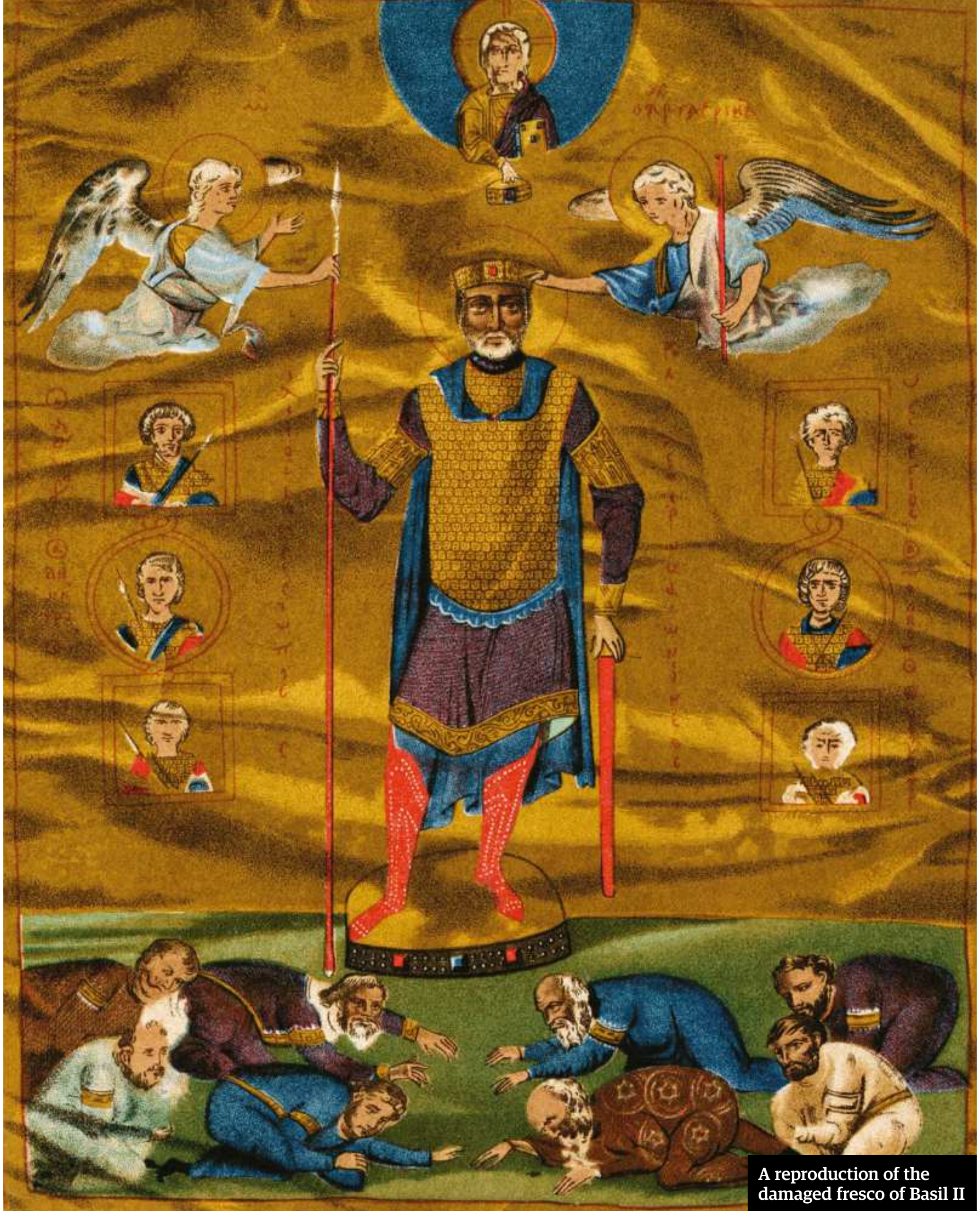
However, despite all precedent, Basil was willing to lay down his sister for the sake of the empire - and his own continued rule. He replied to Vladimir that he would betroth Anna to him, on condition that he become a Christian. For his part, Vladimir also considered himself bound by the oath his father had given to the previous emperor, John Tzimisces, to come to the emperor's aid when called; Vladimir would dispatch a force of 6,000 fully armed Varangians as soon as possible.

As for converting to Christianity, it seemed that Vladimir had been mulling over that possibility himself. In the earlier part of his reign, Vladimir had attempted to impose Slavic paganism on his people, and he erected statues and shrines to the gods in Kiev. According to the Primary Chronicle (compiled in 1113), the worship of these gods included human sacrifice and other sources suggest this could well have been true. But Vladimir's own grandmother had embraced Christianity and the Grand Prince, during the course of his military campaigns, became interested in the competing claims of the various religions he encountered. For, as his power grew, representatives of those religions came to his court seeking his conversion. Muslim Bulgars, no doubt aware of Vladimir's reputation, promised him an afterlife where all his carnal desires would be fulfilled, but at the price of circumcision and abstinence from pork and wine. Vladimir found the first part of the deal desirable but, as for the latter, he said, "Drinking is the joy of the Rus. We cannot exist without that pleasure."

With all these faiths seeking his conversion and that of his people, Vladimir decided to send out embassies to learn for himself which was best. So he sent ten men with instructions to go, observe and report on these contending faiths. On their return, the envoys told Vladimir and his boyars that, so far as the Bulgars were concerned, they had found no happiness but "only sorrow and a dreadful stench." Visiting the churches of German Catholics, they attended many services but "beheld no glory there." However, when they went to Constantinople and attended divine liturgy at the Church of Hagia Sophia, "We knew not whether we were in heaven or on Earth. For on Earth there is no such



The coronation of Basil II in the 12th century, Madrid Skylitzes



A reproduction of the damaged fresco of Basil II

splendour or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We know only that God dwells there among men."

This was convenient for Vladimir politically as well as religiously, for an alliance with the Byzantine Empire would afford him the sort of prestige that none of the other religions could provide. But, for a Grand Prince on the make, only a marriage into the imperial family would provide sufficient grounds for bringing his people over to this new religion.

It was therefore timely for all concerned that Vladimir's interest in Orthodox Christianity should coincide with Basil's sudden need for urgent reinforcements. The reputation of the Varangians as the fiercest of warriors was already well known: indeed, a treaty signed in 911 between the Empire and the Rus had specified that warriors from the Rus were entitled to be enlisted in the service of the empire, "...at whatsoever time they come, and whatsoever their number." Detachments of mercenary Varangians, mindful of the great wealth of Byzantium, had steadily made their way south, sailing down the rivers Dnieper and Don into the Black Sea and on to the city they called Miklagard, the great city. There they had served the emperors of Byzantium in their campaigns.

But now Basil urgently needed help. He persuaded his sister that, for the good of the empire and her brother, she should accept the marriage to Vladimir, while for his part Vladimir sent word that he would accept baptism in return for Anna's hand. The deal agreed, Basil settled down behind the walls of Constantinople to wait.

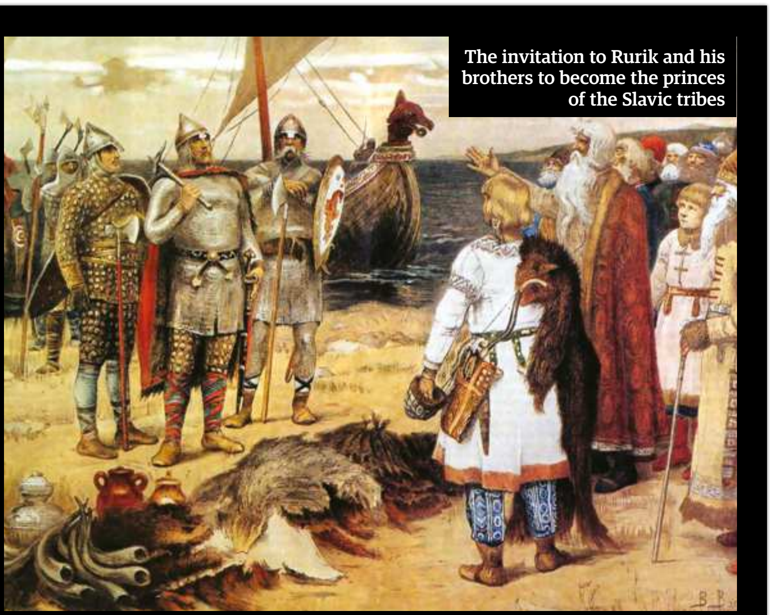
Unfortunately, Vladimir decided to leave the emperor dangling. Basil waited a year. The loyalty

Vikings in the East

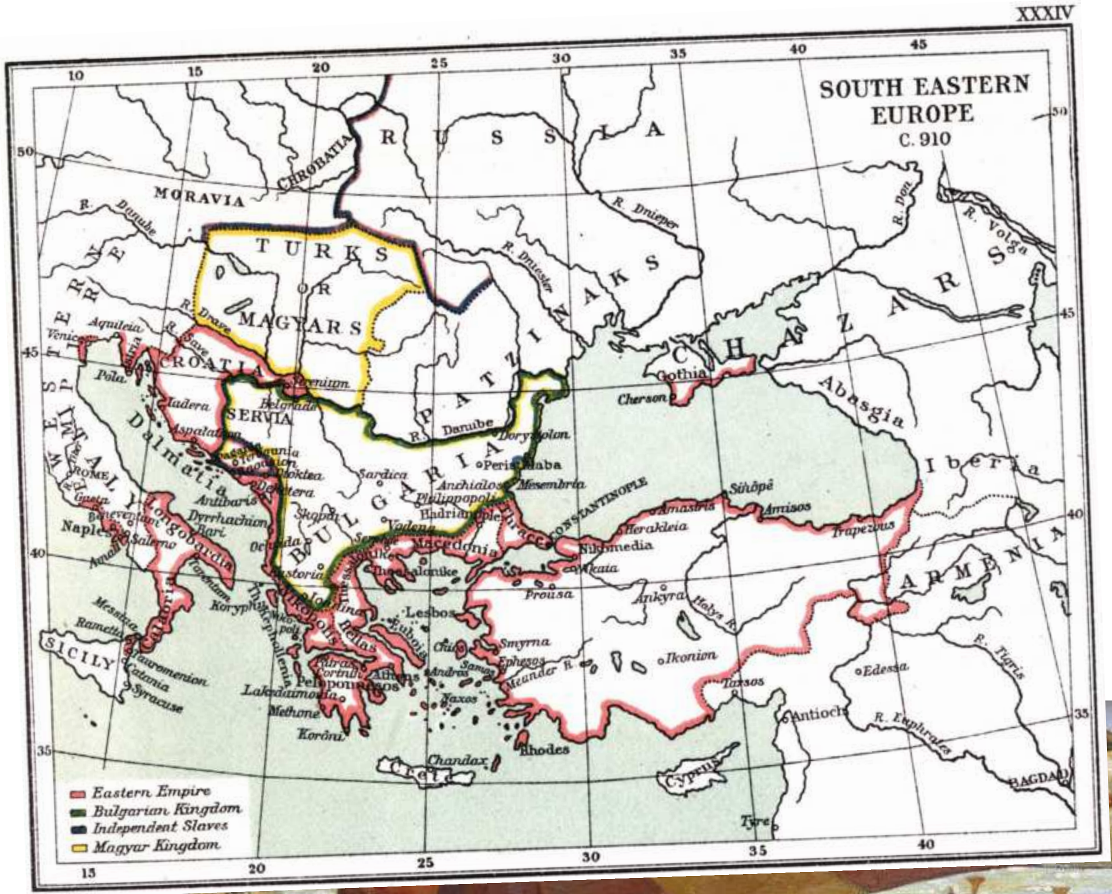
Almost everything we know of the early history of Russian and Ukrainian people comes from the *Primary Chronicle – Tale Of Bygone Years* in its original title – by the monk, Nestor. While scholars now think other authors contributed to the chronicle, the *Primary Chronicle* remains our primary source. In it, Nestor tells how the tribes of Slavs around Novgorod were in a constant state of warfare with each other. They had already had contact with Vikings who, using the rivers as highways for their longboats, had penetrated deep into the interior of this thickly forested land.

Vikings usually made first contact as traders then, if sufficient wealth was uncovered, they returned as raiders and, sometimes, conquerors. But the Slavic tribes along the River Volkhov – a river significant for being the only major river reaching deep into the interior that flows north to the Baltic Sea rather than south to the Black Sea – united and expelled these raiders, only to fall into a state of anarchy. With no one tribe able to gain mastery – and thus everyone reduced to the state of primal warfare, the war of all against all, described in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* – the tribes sent an embassy overseas to the Varangian Rus and invited them to take the rulership of the tribes. The Varangian Rus were probably Swedish Vikings and, for a people invested in gold and glory, the answer was a no brainer: three brothers, with their families and retainers, set off, rowing down the long rivers that provided the highways of ancient Russia and, arriving, bestowed on this land their name: the Rus.

The chief of these brothers was named Rurik, and he set up his base first in Ladoga before moving to Novgorod, near the source of the River Volkov. With his brothers conveniently dying, Rurik dispatched an expedition south, to Constantinople, a city of legendary wealth. On its way, the expedition (which travelled by boat, portaging the vessels where necessary) conquered Kiev, before launching an attack on Constantinople. The attack, which took place sometime between 860 and 866, was the first recorded contact between the Byzantine Empire and the Varangian Rus and, for the Byzantines, it was an unpleasant introduction to their new northern neighbours, for the Vikings devastated the area around the great city. The dynasty Rurik founded would go on to become the first tsars of Russia, enduring until 1598.



The invitation to Rurik and his brothers to become the princes of the Slavic tribes


XXXIV
SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE
C. 910
RUSSIA
CHROBATIA
MORAVIA
R. Danube
TURKS OR MAGYARS
R. Drave
R. Save
R. Dniester
R. Dnieper
R. Don
R. Volga
PATZINAKS
CHAZARS
WESTERN EMPIRE
ITALY
Aquileia
Venice
Pola
CROATIA
Sirmium
Belgrade
SERVIA
Iadera
Aspalathon
Dalmatia
Dioklea
Dekatera
Antibaris
Dyrrhachion
Bari
ROME
Gaeta
Beneventum
Naples
Amalfi
Salerno
Longobardia
Tarentum
Calabria
Messina
Rametta
SICILY
Tauromenion
Catania
Syracuse
Sardica
Skopia
Ochrida
Kastoria
BULGARIA
R. Danube
Dorystolon
Peristhlaba
Anchialos
Mesembria
Philippopolis
Hadrianople
Vodena
Thrace
CONSTANTINOPLE
Macedonia
Thessalonike
Nikopolis
Hellas
Kephallenia
Koryphi
Lesbos
Euboia
Chios
Samos
Andros
Naxos
Patras
Corinth
Athens
Peloponnesos
Lakedaimonia
Methone
Koroni
Crete
Chandax
Rhodes
Smyrna
Ephesos
Meander R.
Prousa
Nikomedia
Nikaia
Herakleia
Amastris
Sinope
Amisos
Trapezus
Ankyra
Halys R.
Ikonion
Tarsos
Antioch
Cyprus
Tyre
Gothia
Cherson
Abasgia
Iberia
ARMENIA
Edessa
R. Tigris
R. Euphrates
BAGDAD
Eastern Empire
Bulgarian Kingdom
Independent Slaves
Magyar Kingdom
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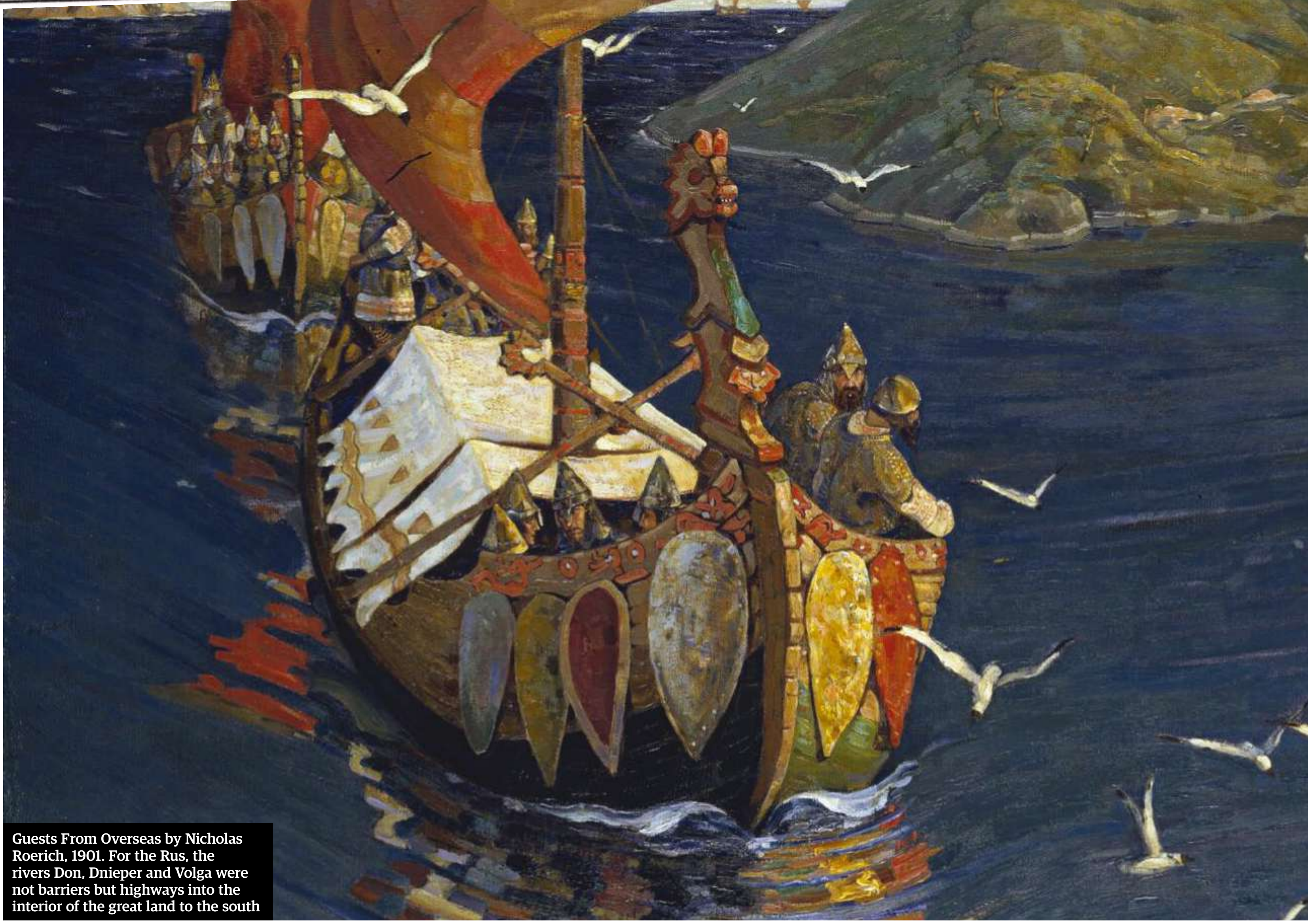
> "However, despite all precedent, Basil was willing to lay down his sister for the sake of the empire – and his own continued rule"


Guests From Overseas by Nicholas Roerich, 1901. For the Rus, the rivers Don, Dnieper and Volga were not barriers but highways into the interior of the great land to the south

of the Imperial Navy preserved his throne during that year, for their constant patrolling of the straits of the Bosphorus and the Hellespont, and the Sea of Marmara, prevented the armies of Bardas Phokas crossing. But without the promised Varangians, Basil knew that he did not have the men to confront Bardas Phokas on land. Finally, as the year drew down to its darkest, lookouts spotted the sails of a great fleet making its way across the Black Sea towards the great city. Vladimir had kept his word. The Varangians had come.

With 6,000 Viking warriors now at his disposal, Basil made swift plans. On a dark night in late February, Basil led his Varangians across the Bosphorus, their oarlocks greased so that they made no sound, while the experienced rowers cut silently into the black water. Landing, they crept through the darkness to the site of the camp of the besieging army, and waited patiently for first light.

When it came, Basil unleashed his Varangians while, from the water, ships of the Imperial Navy hurled Greek fire upon the unsuspecting rebels. Battle swiftly became massacre, with few escaping.

But the leader of the rebels, Bardas Phokas, was not among the dead. Having been visiting his reserves, when news reached him of the disaster that had afflicted one of his armies, he set off with the reserves to his other army, camped on the shores of the Hellespont. If he could capture one of the ports on the Hellespont, he would be able to gather sufficient vessels to transport his army across the strait and come to Constantinople from the south east. But the port of Abydos put up a stout resistance, and the Imperial Navy maintained its patrols, preventing any crossing of the Hellespont. Meanwhile, Basil made his preparations and in mid-March, he set off with the Varangians at his side.

Landing on the eastern shore of the Hellespont, Basil and his Varangians confronted Bardas Phokas and his army, which was drawn from the best troops of Anatolia. The two armies manoeuvred, seeking to gain an advantageous position on the plain that stretches east from Abydos.

Finally, at first light on 13 April 989, Basil ordered his men to attack. The first onslaught, led by his gigantic Varangians, scattered the rebel army. But Bardas Phokas rallied his forces and regrouped. Having fought for the imperial throne for so long and so hard, he would not allow his men to rout.

But then something extraordinary happened. As Bardas Phokas urged on his men, he saw, across the gap that had opened up between the two armies, Basil on horseback, calling his Varangians to even greater feats of arms. Seeing the emperor, Bardas Phokas called for his horse. Mounting it, and despite the best efforts of his own men to stop him, the rebel general turned the animal towards the enemy lines and spurred it into a gallop. Bardas Phokas rode, alone, directly at Basil, his sword pointing at the emperor.

The two armies watched, astonished, as the great struggle for the crown drew down to single combat between the emperor and the general. For Basil did not turn back among his bodyguards but waited in front of his men with his sword in one hand and, in the other, an icon of the Blessed Virgin that was known for its miraculous powers.

It all came down to this.

As Bardas Phokas galloped closer, a faint seemed to pass over him. The reins fell from his hands and, no longer feeling its rider urging it on, his horse slowed then stopped. Slowly, Bardas Phokas toppled from his saddle and lay still on the earth. The general who would have been emperor was dead, and no wound marked him.

Contemporary chroniclers ascribed the death of Bardas Phokas to slow-acting poison, illness or the intercession of the same Mary whose image Basil carried. Contemporary historians have suggested that a sudden stroke, brought about by the stress and exertions of the battle, might have carried off the general.

Whatever the cause, with its leader dead, his army routed. To Basil's Varangians, this was the chance to help themselves to the spoils of battle, and they fell on the panicking men, slaughtering and despoiling them.

The Varangians had proved their worth. Now Basil had to keep his side of the bargain.

Not surprisingly, Anna was none too keen on heading off to a new life among the Varangians, and her departure was delayed. For his part, Vladimir decided to hurry matters along by seizing a key imperial outpost on the north coast of the Black Sea. With 6,000 Varangians still barracked in Constantinople, and having seen for himself how formidable they were in battle, Basil decided that Anna could delay no longer.

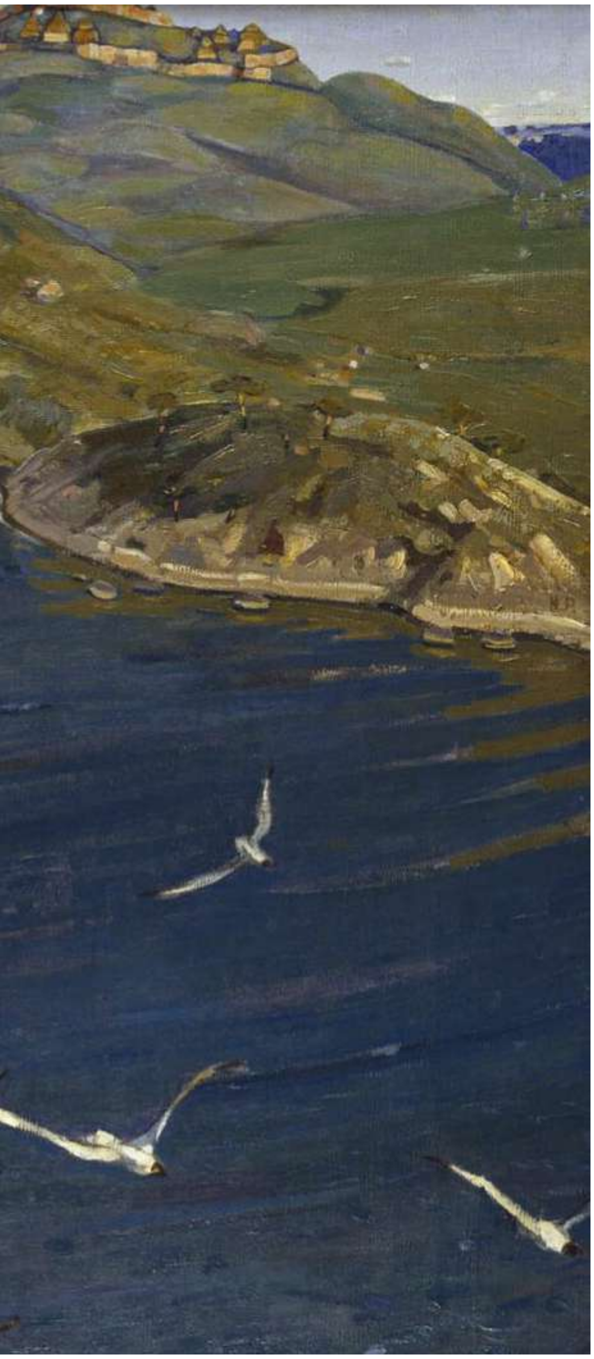
Despite her tears – 'better were it for me to die here' – Anna was embarked, with attendant ladies and priests, for the voyage across the Black Sea to her new husband.

Vladimir was waiting for Anna at the imperial outpost that he had taken from the empire. The Grand Prince was then baptised and promptly married to the imperial Princess Anna.

Marriage made, Vladimir returned the outpost to the empire, before sailing back up the River Dnieper to his capital of Kiev.

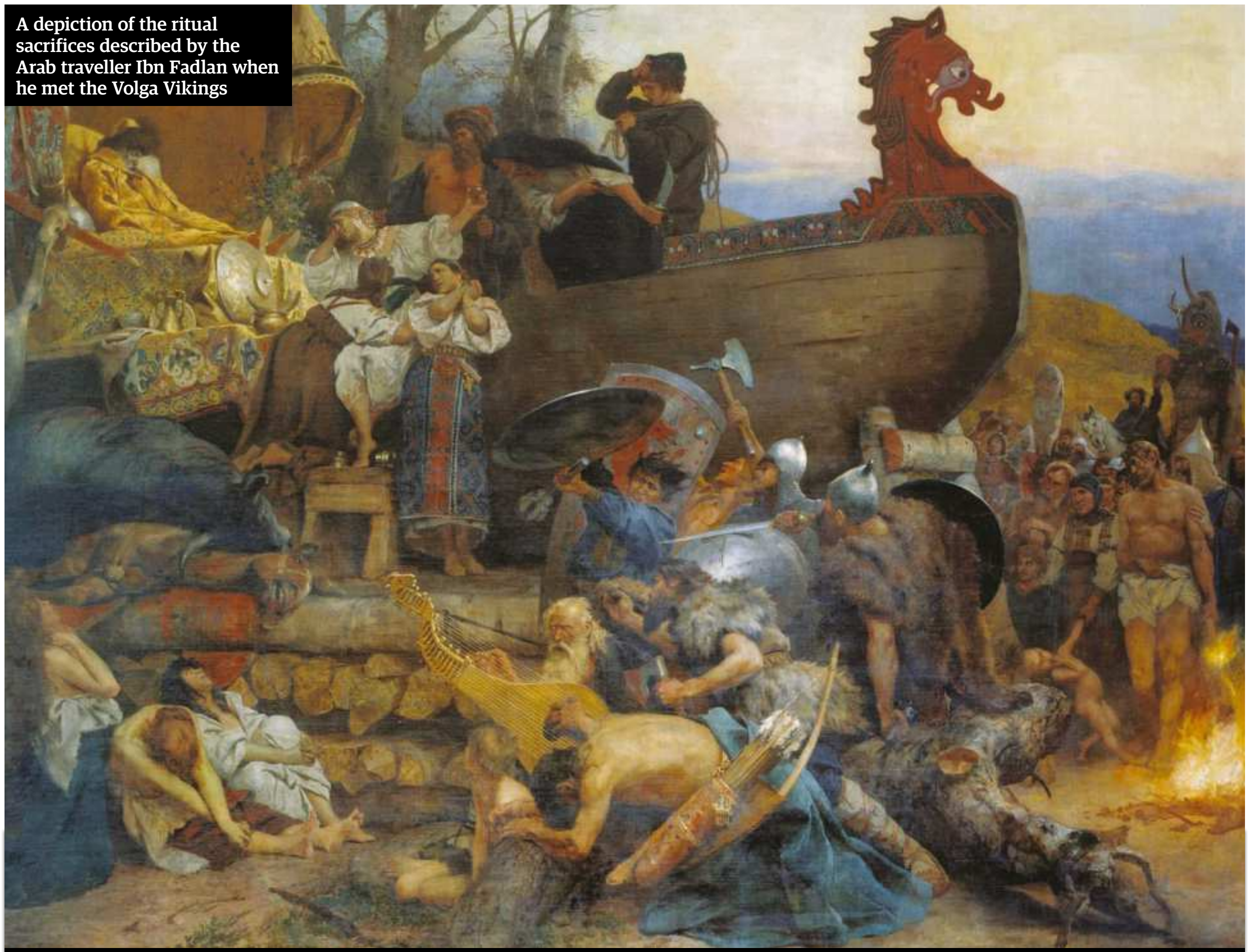
Vladimir returned to Kiev a changed man and he put aside the 800 concubines and the four wives. Then, with his boyars beside him, he pulled down the idol of Perun, dragged it through the mud and threw it into the River Dnieper, ordering that if it came back to shore it should be pushed into the river again until it went over the falls. With Vladimir as its sponsor – he was never an easy man to say no to – Christianity became established

RIGHT Coin showing Basil II with his brother, Constantine, who ruled alongside him in name but who was more than willing to let his brother get on with the job of running the empire



LEFT A 1903-map showing the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) in the decades before Basil II's birth. The Rus lived in the area anachronistically marked 'Russia'

"Vladimir returned to Kiev a changed man and put aside his 800 concubines and the wives"


A depiction of the ritual sacrifices described by the Arab traveller Ibn Fadlan when he met the Volga Vikings

Blood gifts to the gods

The 10th-century Arab traveller Ibn Fadlan left a graphic description of just why Anna thought it would be better to die than marry a prince of the Rus. He wrote about his encounter with the Vikings who traded along the River Volga, who according to Fadlan, were the most "perfect physical specimens" he'd ever seen, so at least Anna could look forward to a handsome husband. But it is in Fadlan's account of the ritual surrounding the death of a chieftain that we see why the Byzantine princess was so reluctant to marry.

The traveller had heard of a death ritual and wanted to see one for himself, so when one of the chiefs of the Volga Vikings died he asked to be present for the funeral.

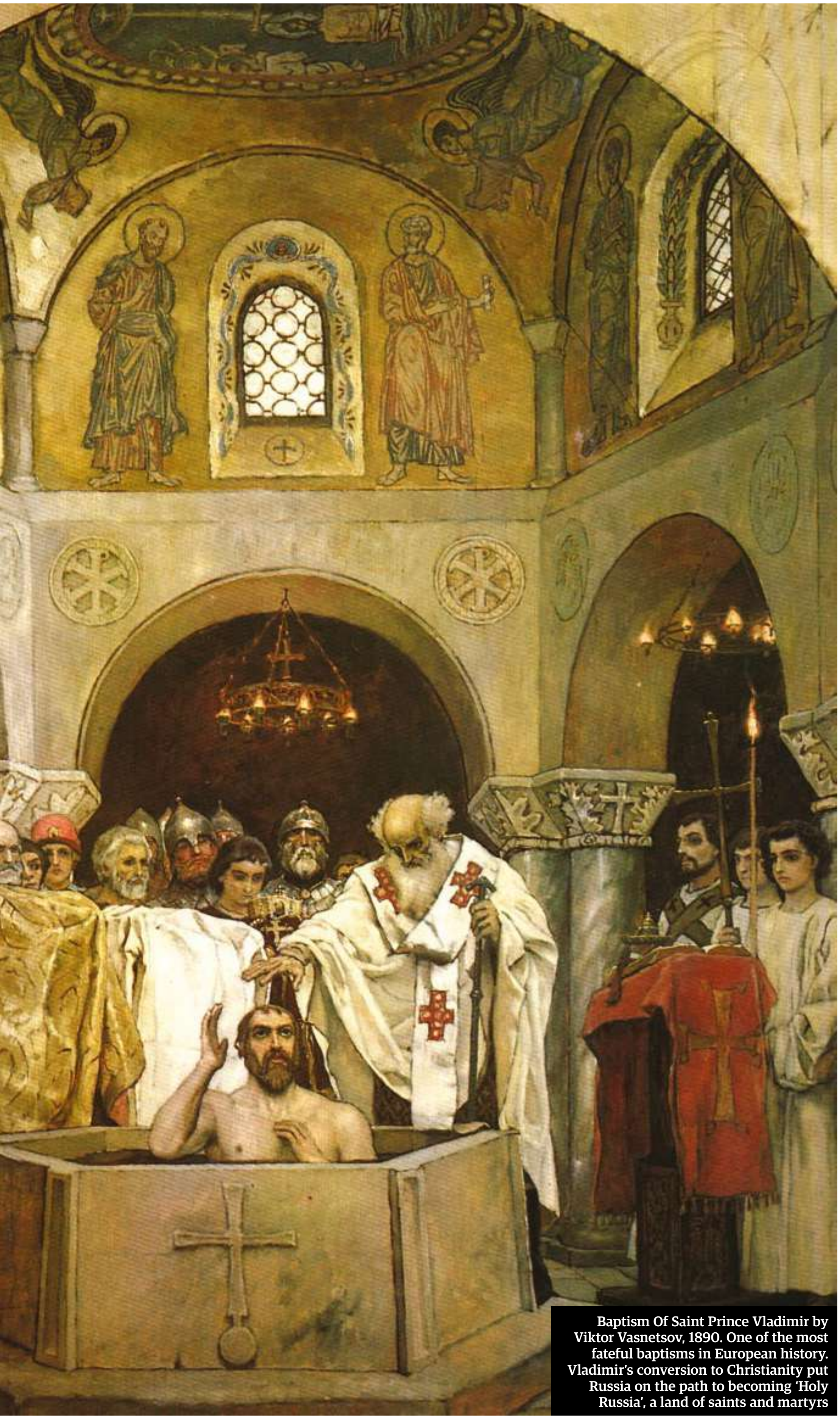
The dead man was buried for ten days before being exhumed, where the cold had made the skin turn black. While the body lay in the ground, the man's slave girls were asked who would accompany him into the next world. One said that she would and during the ten days of preparation, the girl disported herself with the best food, drink and pleasure.

On the day of death, the exhumed chief was placed in his ship, which had been pulled onto the river bank. The chief was laid out among his weapons and goods by an old woman called the Angel of Death. While animals were sacrificed, the slave girl went to the tents of the chieftain's men and had sex with them. Then, coming to a newly fashioned portal, the men lifted the girl up three times. Ibn Fadlan was told that the girl then saw into the next world, seeing her dead relatives and master waiting for her.

The slave girl was then given intoxicating drinks and sang farewell to her companions, before the Angel of Death led her to where her dead master lay. As the rest of the chieftain's companions beat their shields, six men entered and had sex with the slave girl. Then, laying beside her dead owner, four men held her hands and feet while the Angel of Death looped a rope around her neck and gave it to the other two men. Finally, the Angel of Death stabbed the slave girl while the men holding the rope strangled her.

Once the girl was dead, the chieftain's relatives and all his men, each holding a burning brand, set fire to the ship and consigned the chieftain and his slave girl to the flames.

It's no wonder that Anna was less than enthusiastic.



Baptism Of Saint Prince Vladimir by Viktor Vasnetsov, 1890. One of the most fateful baptisms in European history. Vladimir's conversion to Christianity put Russia on the path to becoming 'Holy Russia', a land of saints and martyrs

A pair of 10th century drinking horns found in a burial mound in Chernihiv, in what is now Ukraine, offer a glimpse into the world of the Varangians

among the Rus. And due to the king's marriage into the imperial family, and the golden light of the Hagia Sophia, it was a Christianity that saw the Orthodox Christianity of Constantinople as its guiding star.

As for Basil, a decade of fighting rebels had taught him the value of having a bodyguard that stood outside the politics and rivalries of the noble families of the empire, and Vladimir's contingent of Varangians had provided the perfect solution. Utterly loyal to the emperor, the Varangian Guard became his personal guards and, where necessary, shock troops, defending Basil and his successors to the death. Although initially composed largely of men of Norse stock, after 1066, increasing numbers of exiled Anglo-Saxon warriors sought service with the Emperor of Byzantium so that it became as much an English as a Scandinavian institution. Indeed, 'axe-bearing warriors of British race' are recorded as late as 1404. After that, the Varangians disappear from the historical record.

Whether the last descendants of these fierce warriors made their stand in the final defence of Constantinople in 1453, we do not know. But it would be no surprise if Varangians, wielding their axes, stood alongside the emperor in the final desperate days and then died alongside him, blood guard unto death.

Further reading

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BATTLE OF MANZIKERT

MANZIKERT, BYZANTINE ARMENIA 26 AUGUST 1071

Written by Charlie Ginger

The source of the animosity that existed between the Byzantine and Seljuk empires in August of 1071 - a year that would prove disastrous for one superpower and immensely fruitful for the other - lay in the actions of a Turkish warlord 23 years earlier.

Ibrahim Inal, foster brother of Tughril Beg, famed founder of the Seljuk Empire, initiated the first Seljuk incursions into Byzantine territory in 1048, when he led an army into Iberia (modern-day eastern Turkey). A panicked Emperor Constantine IX pleaded for help from Liparit IV of Georgia, but even his forces couldn't prevent a catastrophe.

Having razed the town of Artze, Inal ended the Anatolia campaign with a victory at the Battle of Kapetrou, a night-time engagement that saw a Seljuk army of 20,000 outmanoeuvre an enemy host of 50,000. Inal then captured Liparit before reportedly heading home with 100,000 captives and enough booty to require 10,000 camels to transport it. It should be said that Inal didn't always have it all his own way - in 1058 he rebelled against Tughril, resulting in him being garrotted by his sibling with his own bow string.

Despite this horrendous reversal at the hands of a wily foe, in 1053, Constantine IX made the inexplicable decision to disband the Iberian army, which at the time numbered 50,000 men. History has judged this as a grave error on the part of an emperor who presumably trusted a truce that had been signed with the Seljuks in 1049.

Unfortunately for the people of Byzantium, one incompetent ruler was followed by another in the form of Constantine X in 1059. Constantine undermined the realm in a similar fashion to his namesake by drastically cutting the funding and training provided to the Byzantine army. Combined with the move to replace soldiers with mercenaries, Constantine weakened the empire at a time when Seljuk incursions were increasing.

The folly of Constantine's actions was brutally highlighted in 1064 when, in direct contravention of a recently agreed truce, a Seljuk army under the command of Alp Arslan (installed as sultan of the empire in 1063 and whose name translates as 'Heroic Lion') laid siege to the city of Ani, located in what is today eastern Turkey.

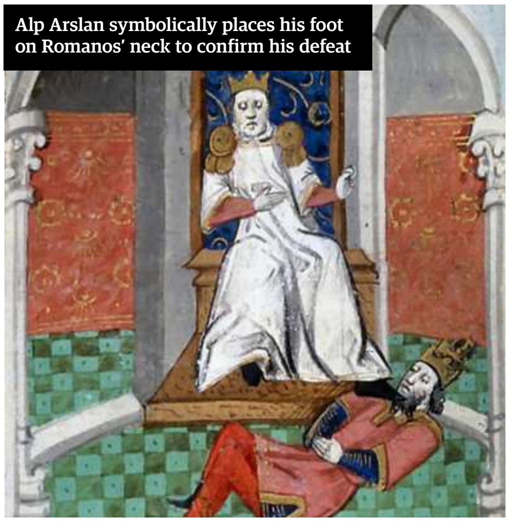
A sprawling settlement of around 100,000, Ani was one of the largest cities in the world, benefitting greatly from its location on a number of trading routes and the sophisticated nature of its defences. Yet these fortifications offered little solace when Arslan came calling. A cunning and ruthless commander, Arslan managed to take the city within 25 days. His victory spelled disaster for the men, women and children of the city. According to Arab historian Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, "The city became filled with the bodies of the slain."

The mood within the upper circles of Byzantium was bleak. Yet there was soon to be some cause for optimism, as in November 1067 Constantine X finally breathed his last, and his death enabled the aristocracy to install a more able leader.

Elected as emperor in 1068 (the same year in which the Normans began their siege of Bari, a critical Byzantine stronghold), Romanos IV Diogenes wasted little time in reforming an ailing military in a bid to reverse the empire's decline.

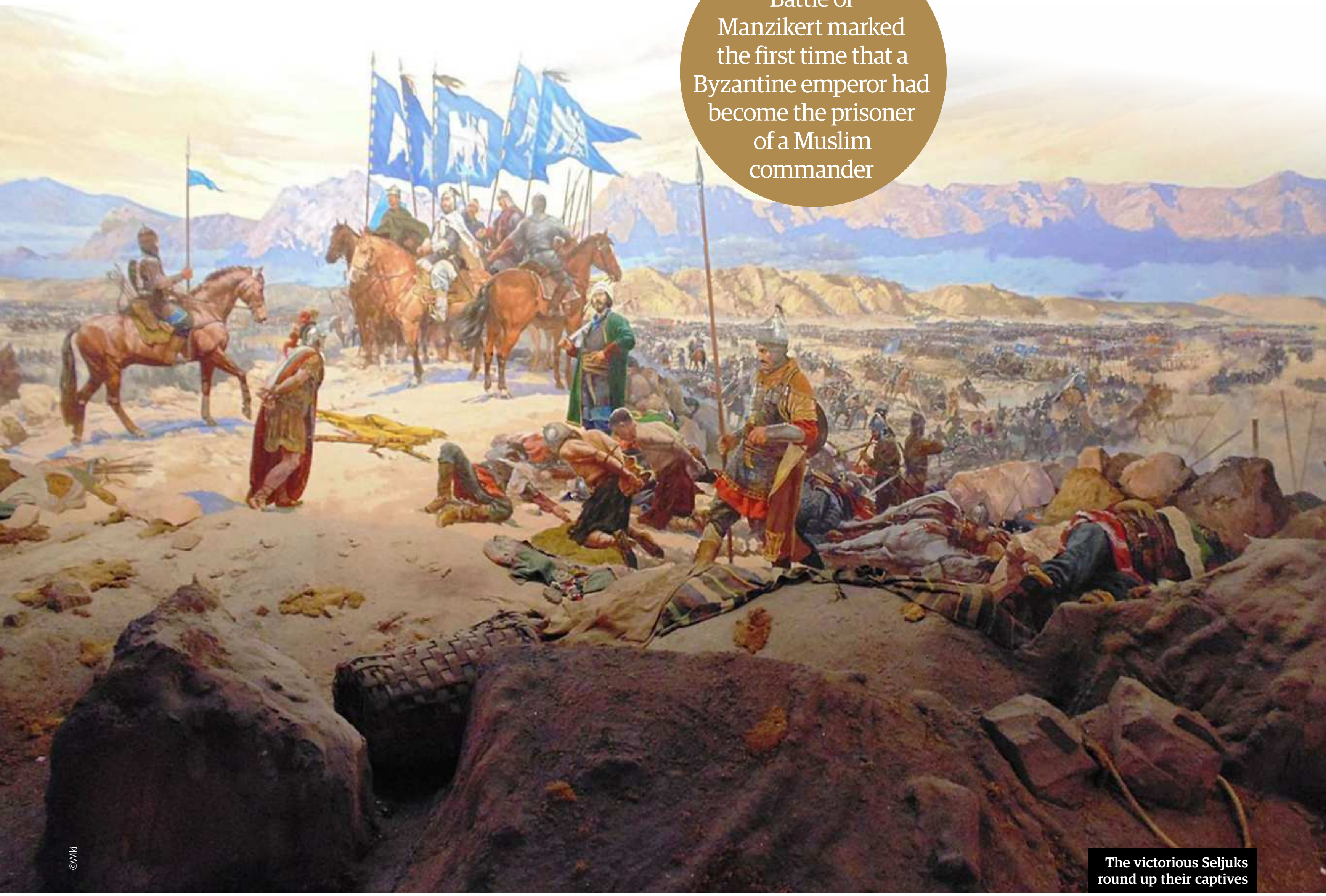
Romanos enjoyed some success in his efforts to check the Seljuk threat, dispatching a general by the name of Manuel Komnenos to take the modern-day city of Manbij in northern Syria and save Iconium from Arslan's clutches. However, all did not go as planned, and Komnenos was

"Arslan's victory spelled disaster for people of the city. According to one historian, 'The city became filled with the bodies of the slain'"


Alp Arslan symbolically places his foot on Romanos' neck to confirm his defeat

©Wiki

> The Battle of Manzikert marked the first time that a Byzantine emperor had become the prisoner of a Muslim commander



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The victorious Seljuks round up their captives

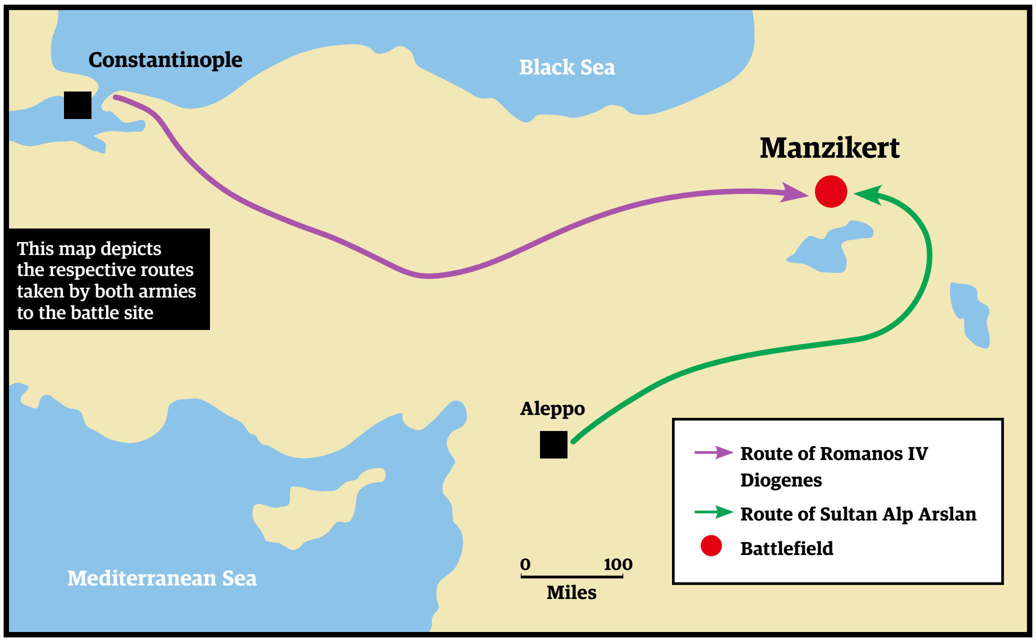
captured. The Seljuks then proceeded to take the fortress of Manzikert in Asia Minor.

Yet, while appearing an unstoppable military force, Arslan's Seljuk armies were in fact dangerously overstretched, the reason being Arslan's ongoing struggle against the nation he regarded as his primary adversary: Fatimid Egypt.

Born in the central Asian region of Khwarazm in 1029, Arslan was the son of Chaghri Beg, himself nephew of Toghril, and was in line to inherit a vast land known as Khorasan that would today encompass Iran, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.

Arslan's turn to rule came after the death of his father in 1060, and the 31 year old proved to be a smart political operator, his careful blend of peace and punishment helping him to gradually expand and then secure a burgeoning empire.

Emboldened by a combination of military success and Byzantine weakness, Arslan proved a constant thorn in the side of a slowly declining empire, a pain that eventually led to the two sides negotiating a fragile peace in 1069.



This map depicts the respective routes taken by both armies to the battle site

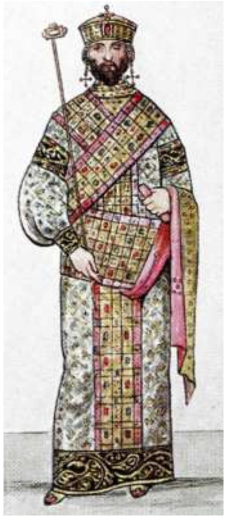
Constantinople
Black Sea
Manzikert
Aleppo
Mediterranean Sea
0
100
Miles
→ Route of Romanos IV Diogenes
→ Route of Sultan Alp Arslan
● Battlefield

Byzantine Empire

TROOPS 40,000 **NUMBER OF NATIONALITIES** 7

ROMANOS IV

KEY LEADER



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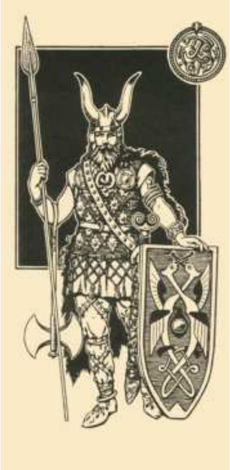
Determined to rid Anatolia of the Seljuk threat Romanos set out to seize strategically vital positions before destroying Arslan's forces.

Strengths: Experienced and personally courageous, Romanos led from the front.

Weaknesses: Tactically naïve in the face of Arslan's methods, both prior to and during the battle.

VARANGIAN GUARD

KEY UNIT



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Largely drawn from northern Europe, these elite imperial bodyguards fought valiantly to defend Romanos IV in a hopeless struggle.

Strengths: Well drilled, heavily armed and loyal to the emperor.

Weaknesses: Badly exposed when pitted against fast-moving mounted archers.

© Wiki

DANE AXE

KEY WEAPON

The favoured weapon of the Varangian Guard, the Dane axe featured an ash or oak haft (up to 1.2 metres in length) and a thin, horned, steel head.

Strengths: Specifically forged to be both strong and incredibly sharp. Manoeuvrable in close-quarters combat.

Weaknesses: It was little use against marauding archers who were firing from range.

With an understanding already in place, Arslan had no reason to question Romanos' apparently genuine offer in 1071 to renew the truce. However, it would soon transpire that only one party was entering discussions honestly.

Romanos committed what he must have hoped would be a brilliantly timed piece of treachery by mobilising his army. A force of 40,000 men (10,000 Byzantines, 500 Norman mercenaries, plus the Varangian Guard, infantry under the command of the Duke of Antioch and sellswords from England, Bulgaria, Georgia and the Frankish Empire) began marching towards Manzikert, which the emperor desperately wished to reclaim.

The Byzantine horde endured a torrid journey but eventually made its way past the Upper Euphrates River. As his target loomed, Romanos divided his army, ignoring the pleas of generals such as Nicephorus Bryennios to fortify the Byzantine position and instead sending 20,000 men under the command of general Joseph Tarchaneiotes to the fortress of Akhlat. The other half was to remain with the emperor and head for Manzikert.

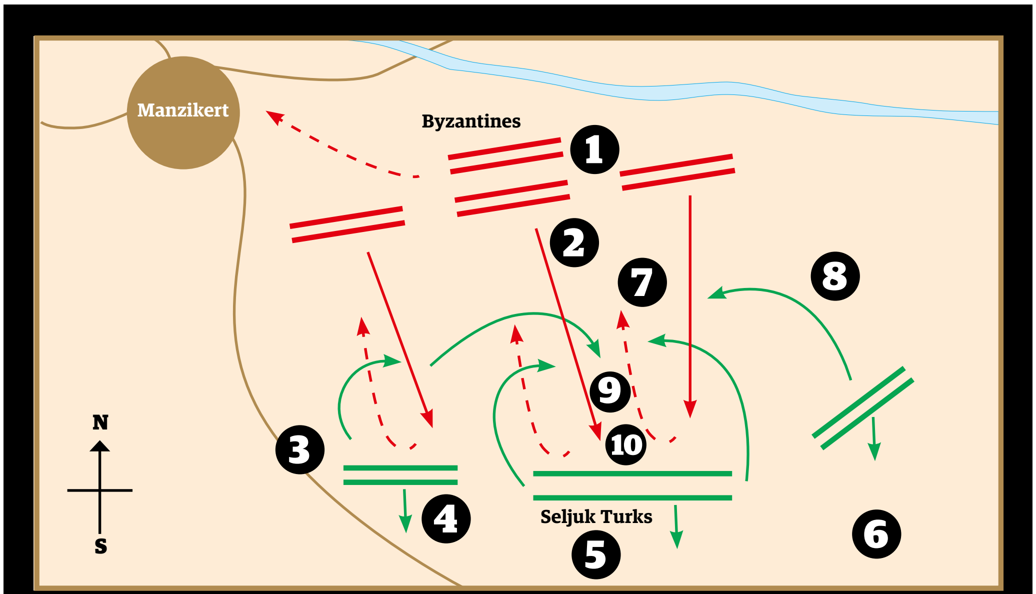
Arslan, meanwhile, did not panic. He displayed his characteristic cunning by keeping his cavalry-heavy army out of sight as he led it around Lake Van. Tarchaneiotes had no idea that he was about to be pounced on. Arslan had achieved the element of surprise, so much so that some sources claim the Byzantine fled as soon as Arslan was sighted.

The suggestion that a seasoned general heading 20,000 troops would flee so easily has been questioned, however, with some historians believing Tarchaneiotes was in fact part of a wider conspiracy to precipitate Romanos' downfall.

Utterly ignorant of the loss of half of his army, Romanos proceeded to capture Manzikert on 23 August with little effort. Yet the true test of the Byzantine army lay ahead, and again it would be hampered by the emperor's lack of foresight.

The day after securing Manzikert, the Byzantines discovered Arslan's army. But Romanos fumbled again, assuming that it was not Arslan's entire force. He sent forth some of his cavalry to apprehend the enemy. They were promptly put to the sword.

Regardless, Romanos did not deem it necessary to pull back, his encampment remaining on the flat, open ground beyond the walls of Manzikert. Even when, on the 25th, fate provided him with an opportunity to escape, Romanos stood firm in the face of the Seljuk ambassadors offering peace. He vowed to stand and fight.



How Romanos lost Manzikert

1. Romanos forms ranks
Emperor Romanos organises his 20,000 men into a long line several ranks deep, with his cavalry on either flank. He commands the centre himself, with Bryennios taking the left and Alyattes the right. Bizarrely, he entrusts the reserve forces to Andronikos Dukas, who openly loathes Romanos.

2. The Byzantines advance
Confident of luring the Seljuks into a pitched battle, Romanos orders his men to advance. They achieve little while wasting energy.

3. Death from on high
The Seljuk mounted archers exploit the flat ground to harry the Byzantine troops from range, raining down arrows.

4. An elusive foe
The Byzantines continue to pursue only for Alp Arslan to pull his formation back in time.

5. Arslan's camp falls
The Byzantines enjoy a Pyrrhic victory in the afternoon when they take a Seljuk camp.

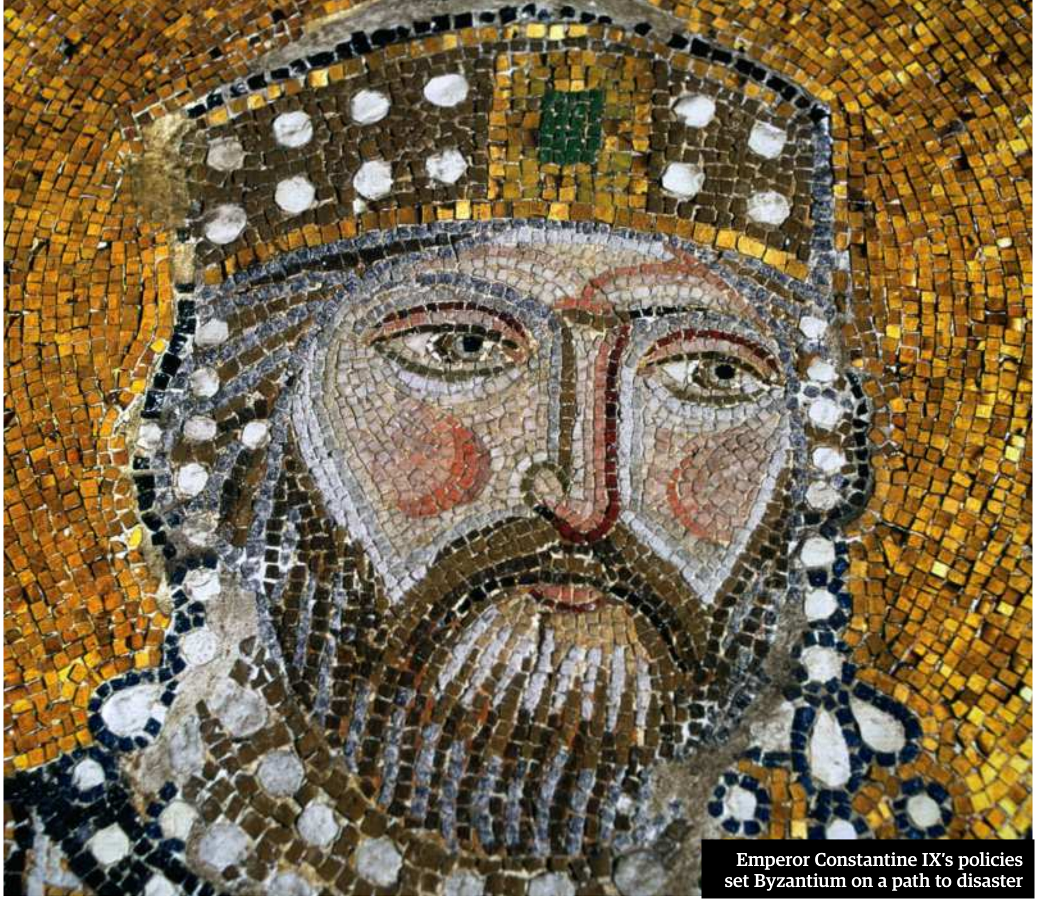
6. Darkness descends
The loss of the camp proves no impediment to Arslan, who keeps an elevated position.

7. Fall back!
Romanos withdraws to his camp for the night. During the confused retreat, rumours swirl that Romanos himself has fallen. The Byzantines begin to collapse into chaos.

8. Arslan makes his move
Arslan orders his cavalry to charge. As the first rows smash into Romanos' stricken soldiers, others circle the flanks.

9. Protect the emperor!
In a brief struggle, the Byzantines lose 8,000 troops. The Varangian Guard, Romanos' personal bodyguard, fights on to the death. Romanos himself is no less brave, battling until his horse is killed and his sword hand has been wounded.

10. A king brought to heel
After a night in chains lying among the dead and dying, Romanos is brought to Arslan, who takes his prisoner into lavish captivity for a week before releasing him.



Emperor Constantine IX's policies set Byzantium on a path to disaster

©Alamy

> "Byzantine morale was further dented by news that their Turkish mercenaries had defected to Arslan during the night"

Arslan immediately made Romanos pay by unleashing his mounted archers. These horsemen were able to fire their bows from the saddle, and proceeded to shower the stationary Byzantine camp with missiles throughout the night.

Romanos' army prepared to engage the Seljuks the following day. Fatigued by their restless night, their morale was further dented by the news that their Turkish mercenaries had exploited the confusion of the darkness to defect to Arslan.

Undeterred, the Byzantine emperor ordered his men into a long line several ranks deep. Romanos would command the centre, while the left would answer to Bryennios and the right to Alyattes, a general from Cappadocia in central Turkey. Fatefully, he placed the command of his reserve in the hands of Andronikos Doukas, a son of the Doukids, a dynasty who had once ruled Byzantium and wished to do so again.

The Byzantines spent the morning tiring themselves in doomed attempts to bait Arslan's cavalry, while Arslan kept his curved formation back, avoiding a close-quarters struggle that would not favour his lightly armoured soldiers.

As night drew near, Romanos decided it would be best to withdraw. Of all his choices, this would prove to be the most catastrophic. As his troops began to turn back, gaps opened in the previously tight Byzantine ranks. The chaos that ensued was then compounded when Andronikos sent a rumour that Romanos had fallen rippling through the lines. The Byzantine army was rapidly falling apart - it was the moment Arslan had been waiting for.

The Seljuk cavalry began its charge. As bows twanged and spears and swords cleaved holes in the panicked Byzantine ranks, Andronikos led his men from the field, an act of betrayal that sealed the now-surrounded Byzantines' fate.

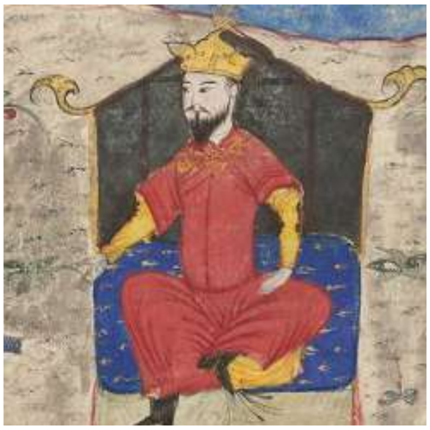
Admirably given the situation, Romanos and his Varangian Guard refused to yield, instead fighting on until the entire Guard lay dead and Romanos' sword hand had received a wound serious enough to force him to surrender.

Bound in chains and left among the carnage, Romanos was not brought before Arslan until the following morning. Remarkably, the sultan showed his prisoner nothing but kindness, and during Romanos' stay in Seljuk captivity he was allowed to eat at Arslan's table as an honoured guest. Even so, defeat was not without its costs.

Arslan set his price at an immediate payment of 1.5 million gold coins, plus an annual tribute of 360,000 coins and the cessation of Armenia, Edessa, Hierapolis and Antioch. Romanos was also forced to give his daughter's hand in marriage to one of Arslan's sons. With the terms of this agreement in place, Arslan provided Romanos with an escort of 100 Mamelukes and sent him on his way. Given the fate that would soon befall him, however, it may have been kinder to execute him.

Seljuk Empire

CAVALRY 40,000 **NUMBER OF NATIONALITIES** 2



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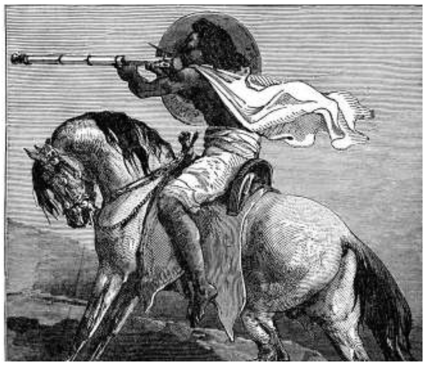
ALP ARSLAN

KEY LEADER

An immensely capable commander, Arslan enjoyed numerous military successes throughout a reign that saw him dramatically expand the Seljuk Empire.

Strengths: Ruthless, cunning and ambitious, Arslan selected ground favourable for his cavalry.

Weaknesses: Lacked his own heavy infantry and was therefore almost totally reliant on cavalry.



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TURKOMAN RIDERS

KEY UNIT

Recruited from nomadic Turkic tribes, these superbly disciplined archers could be devastating on flat, open ground.

Strengths: Fast, dynamic and able to fire backwards from their saddles.

Weaknesses: Their light armour afforded no protection if it came to hand-to-hand combat.

EASTERN TURKESTAN BOW

KEY WEAPON

This curved bow was made from wood, sinew and horn. It sported rigid tips known as 'ears'.

Strengths: Its shorter size offered more stored energy than a straight bow.

Weaknesses: Reliant on the archer having the time and space to fire.

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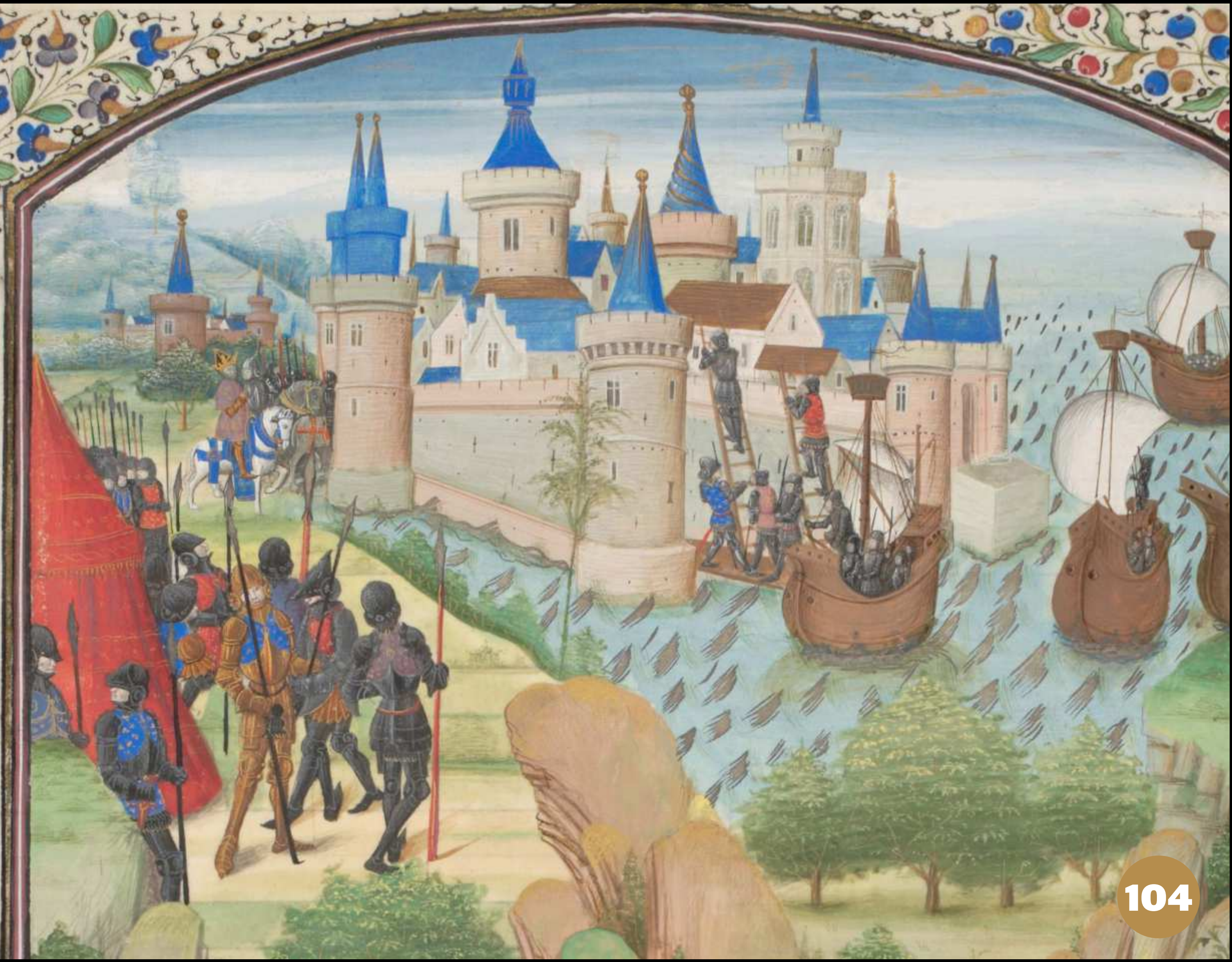
112

DOWNFALL

104 BYZANTIUM IN THE CRUSADES
How the so-called 'Holy Wars' became the death knell for the greatest city in Christendom

112 THE ROMAN EMPIRE'S LAST STAND
The Ottomans dreamed of seizing Constantinople. In 1453, both sides prepared for a decisive showdown

120 WHAT DID THE BYZANTINES DO FOR US?
The Byzantine legacy – from the Renaissance to religion, language, law and… forks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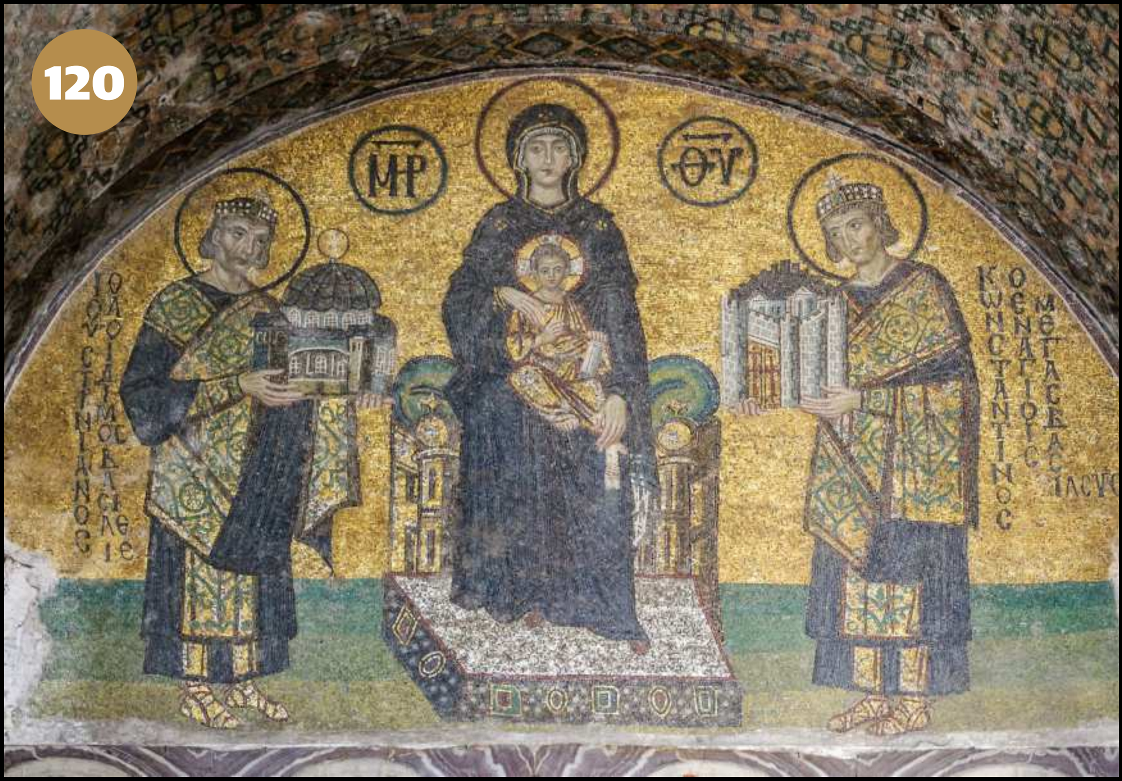
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BYZANTIUM IN THE CRUSADES

How the so-called 'Holy Wars' became the death knell for the greatest city in Christendom

Written by Mohammed Barber

In the space of about 150 years, Constantinople went from the 'Queen of Cities' to being sacked by Christians in the Fourth Crusade. The story of how this happened brings together all the elements of a great epic; precious cities under threat, punishing sieges, hundreds of thousands moving from West to East, political ploys by emperors and popes, brutal murders and major battles. Discover the cross-continental crusader tale as seen by the Byzantines, and how the movement to take Jerusalem from its Muslim captors destroyed the greatest Christian city in the world.

At an estimated 375,000 inhabitants, Constantinople was one ofthe largest cities in the Christian world in 1150. Comparable cities at the time include Palermo, Italy with roughly 350,000 inhabitants and Cordoba, Spain with 450,000. The Byzantine Empire stretched from southern Italy to Eastern Europe, across the Mediterranean, modern-day Turkey and to parts of Armenia. Located between the nerve centre of the European and Asian worlds, Constantinople benefitted from the passing trade of Arabs, Russians, and Italians. Its incredible wealth was legendary.

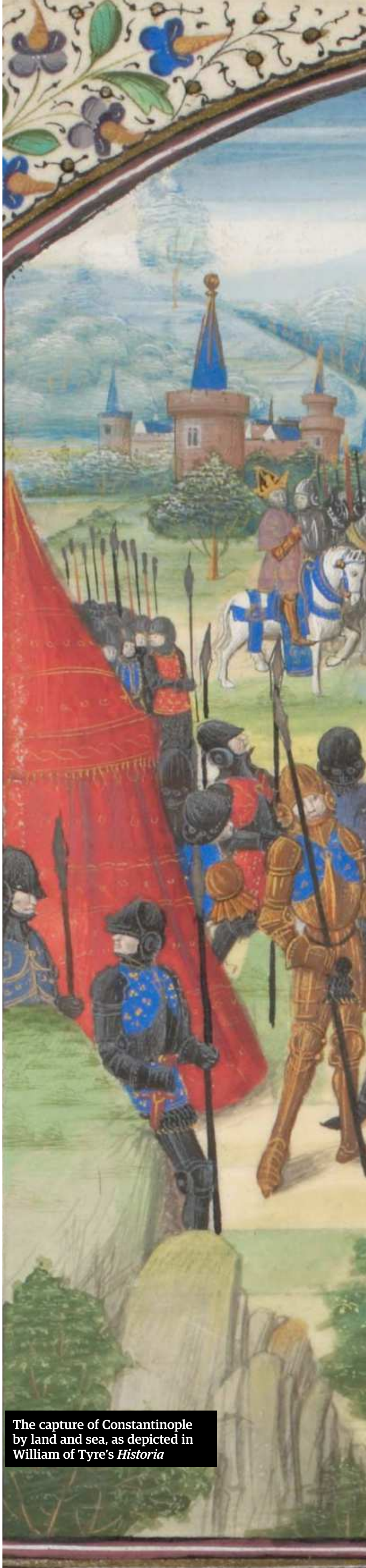
The city's fortunes started to shift when its borders came under attack. Seljuk Turks attacked the Armenian border to the East, whilst Norman Frenchmen attacked the Italian borders to the West. Through the late 1050s and 1060s the Seljuks continued to pick away at Byzantine territories, and something needed to be done. In 1071 Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes took a large army and marched on Manzikert, expecting a band of isolated Turks. Instead he found the main army of Sultan Alp Arslan. Romanos' armies were defeated, he was captured, and Manzikert fell to the Seljuks. The defeat itself was not, however, disastrous because Alp Arslan had his eyes fixed on Fatimid Egypt. No demands for Byzantine lands were made and the captive emperor was released just a few days later.

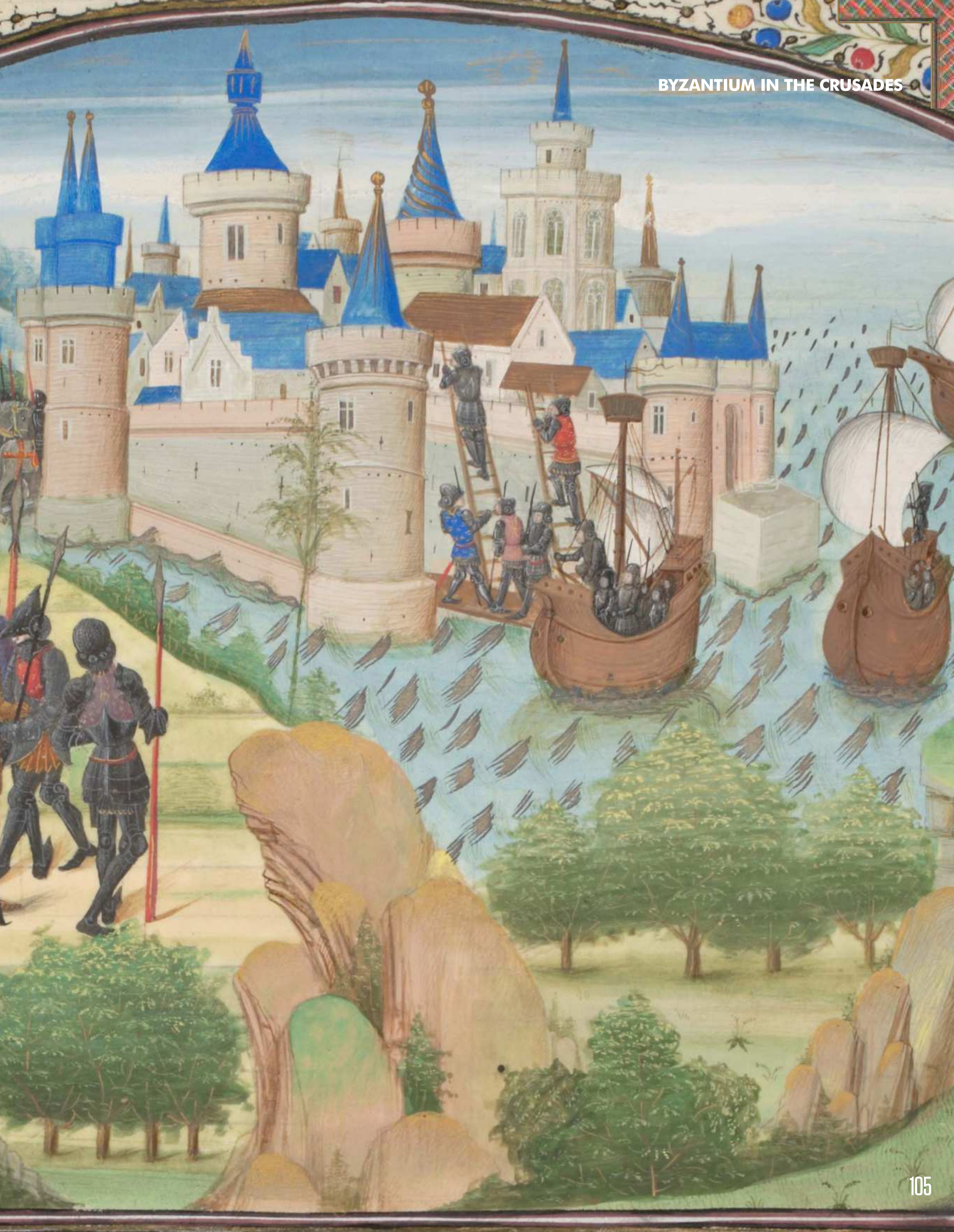
Though lasting for just a few days, the emperor's enemies were quick to mobilise. Upon returning to Constantinople, Romanos found that the Doukas family had conspired against him and had one of their own, Michael VII Doukas, proclaimed emperor. Civil war broke out for the next decade so whilst potential rivals vied for the emperorship, Norman, Armenian and Turkish warlords chipped away at the empire until nearly all of Asia Minor had been taken from Byzantine control in 1090.

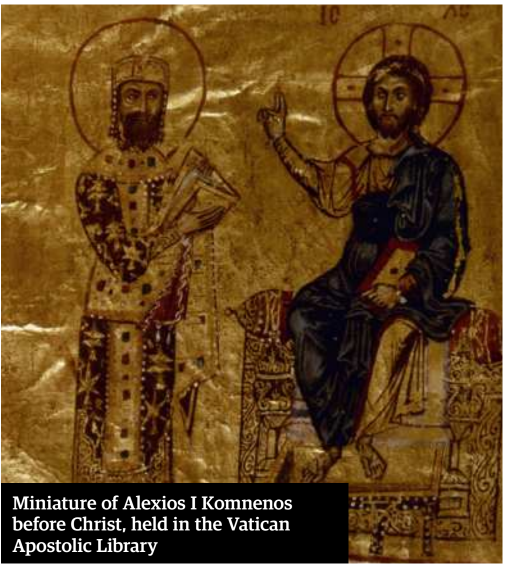
Having said that, despite the loss of territory, Byzantium was not facing the crisis of just a few years previously. The death of Suleiman ibn Kutulmush, the Seljuk sultan, in 1086 laid bare the fragile unity of the Seljuks and in 1091 the Pechengs had been dealt a deadly blow. In other words, Asia Minor was primed to be reconquered.

In 1095 the emperor of Byzantium, Alexios Komnenus, sent a delegation to see Pope Urban II at Piacenza. Alexios asked for mercenaries, and perhaps played up the protection of Jerusalem to rouse spirits. That the emperor deliberately induced the First Crusade is far more unlikely given his surprise when thousands turned up the following year. Nevertheless, despite the emperor's motives, it was Urban II's words that turned a rather standard application for help into an existential plea to save Jerusalem from the invading infidels.

> It was Urban II's words that turned an application for help into a plea to save Jerusalem from the invading infidels


The capture of Constantinople by land and sea, as depicted in William of Tyre's *Historia*





© Getty

Miniature of Alexios I Komnenos before Christ, held in the Vatican Apostolic Library

Borders under attack

The Seljuk Turks were not the only ones trying to breach Constantinople's walls. To the West control over southern Italy was lost to the Normans under their leader, Robert Guiscard in 1071. Ten years later Guiscard and his son launched another attack on the Byzantine's Balkan regions and nearly succeeded in capturing the emperor, thereby presenting the real chance that the Normans would march onto the gates of Constantinople. Throughout the century, fearing that provincial armies would become too powerful and their generals too ambitious – and it would only take a few with delusions of glory – the Byzantine emperors hired mercenaries to fight Byzantine battles, including Turks.

Against the Pechengs (a Turkic people who by this point had kicked out the Magyars – otherwise known as Hungarians – across the Danube River and occupied the steppe between the Don and Danube Rivers) in 1090 for example, Alexios I hired mercenaries from all over the empire, though in reality many of them came from Western Europe. But the emperor didn't sit around in the hope Western Europeans, or Latins as they were called back then, would volunteer themselves for service. Byzantine officials laden with gifts went to Western Europe specifically to recruit them. Though some mercenaries, like the aforementioned Roussel of Bailleul, were out for themselves and deserted the army, on the whole the policy worked, until it brought three large crusading armies onto the doorstep of Constantinople.

© Getty

The mighty walls of Constantinople that would have looked formidable in the Middle Ages

The papacy had recently undergone a seismic shift of its own, the battle between who has ultimate authority on Earth: the papacy, or secular rulers? Urban II believed it was the former, and used this opportunity to exercise his authority across Western Europe, but also to stretch it across into the Byzantine Empire. In his eyes, he was the head of all Christendom, Catholic or otherwise. Moreover, Urban II received the delegation at Piacenza because he couldn't receive them in Rome. He was in a quarrel with the Holy Roman emperor, Henry IV, and many did not accept Urban II as their pope, preferring Henry IV's candidate, Clement III. Launching the crusade was just as much about European papal politics as it was liberating Jerusalem and saving the Christian empire to the East.

In November 1095, Urban II gave the first sermon calling upon ordinary folk and the landed gentry alike to journey to the East for God. The response exceeded all expectations. By 1096 the first crusaders arrived in Constantinople and Alexios was shocked and alarmed to find tens of thousands marching onto his doorstep. He had promised provisions for the Latins but resources were patchy. The crusaders took to plundering towns and villages along the way, so despite the crusaders marketing themselves as the soldiers of Christ coming to liberate the Holy Land, they looked more like an invading army. Alexios feared the Latin leaders would unite and attack Constantinople, and so he ferried each individual army across the Bosporus to avoid them gathering all in one place, and extracted oaths of loyalty that any conquered territories would be returned to him. Begrudgingly, the Latin leaders complied.

In return, to show his appreciation as well as diffuse animosities, Alexios handed out gold, silver and other gifts. The crusading armies then entered Asia Minor and laid siege to Nicaea, aided by Byzantine ships. A relieving force of Seljuk's headed by sultan Kilij Arslan I failed to break through and the city surrendered in June 1097. Seeking to take advantage of the Seljuk's disarray, Alexios sent his brother-in-law, John Doukas, into western Asia Minor capturing Smyrna, Ephesus and Philadelphia.

Whilst Alexios sent his forces into Asia Minor, the crusaders laid siege to Antioch, a strategic stronghold en route to Palestine. Alexios provided very few Byzantine troops and provisions were so low the crusaders were reduced to eating boiled animal skins. Horses lay dying, equipment rotted away, and the bitterly cold Syrian weather did nothing to improve their lot. Moreover, a Turkish force was coming led by the atabeg (governor) of Mosul, and so the crusaders were now hopelessly outnumbered. Alexios did mobilise his army to relieve the siege in the summer of 1098, but was met midway by a few Latin knights who convinced him the siege was on the verge of surrender. Not wanting to put his forces in harm's way for a lost cause, Alexios turned his army around and went home. But the cause was not lost. A crusader called Peter Bartholomew claimed he found the Holy Lance, the spear that pierced the side of Christ during the crucifixion. Many doubted the relic's authenticity, and they were right to, because the real Holy Lance was in the Great Palace in Constantinople. Nevertheless, fresh determination washed through the crusaders convinced God was on their side and against impossible adds and against all expectations, Antioch fell to the crusaders in June 1098.

Alexios' primary concern throughout the crusade was the welfare of his empire, a concern his predecessors would share as further crusades were

The famous bronze horses in St Mark's Basilica, Venice, looted from Constantinople in 1204

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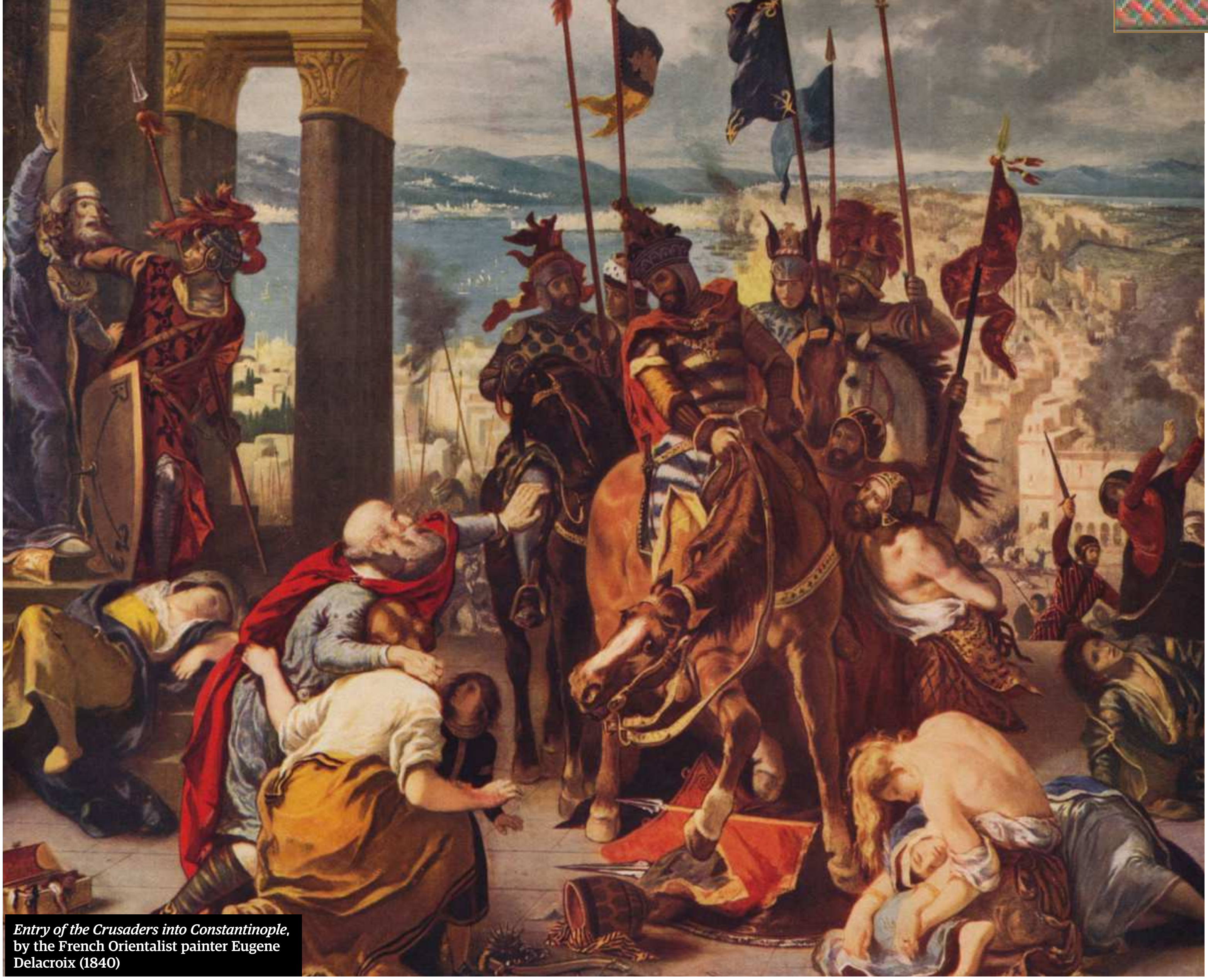

Entry of the Crusaders into Constantinople, by the French Orientalist painter Eugene Delacroix (1840)

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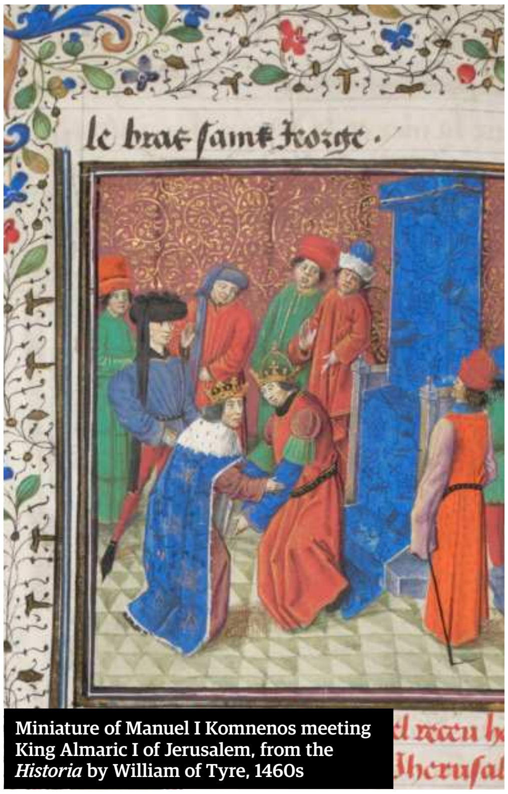
"The crusaders may have been Christians, but Alexios thought them a threat all the same. His suspicions were confirmed"

called. The crusaders may have been Christians, but Alexios thought them a threat all the same. His suspicions were confirmed when Bohemond of Taranto ejected the garrison and took the city. Having said that, Alexios did not make things much easier for himself. A delegation left in July 1098 for Constantinople inviting the emperor to take charge of the city, and uphold his promise to aid the crusaders in reaching Jerusalem. Alexios took eight months to reply, by which time Antioch was under Bohemond's authority. The delegation left without achieving anything except for leaving both parties more irritated with each other.

The crusaders pressed forward onto their target: Jerusalem. Once again food ran short and numbers were against them, but yet again they eventually gained the upper hand and the holy city was taken amidst an orgy of indiscriminate murder, rape, infanticide, and desecration. Against all odds the crusaders had done it. Jerusalem came back under Christian (specifically Catholic) control but bridges between the Latins and Byzantines had been burned, influencing relations for decades to come as the Latins decided to stay. The settled regions became known as the Crusader States: Edessa; the principality of Antioch; the county of Tripoli; and the Kingdom of Jerusalem (which proclaimed a King). Alexios was anxious the crusaders had come to take his lands, and he'd been proven right.

A particular thorn in Alexios' side was Bohemond of Taranto, the Italian who seized Antioch. He took control of Laodikeia in 1103, launched a failed attack on Harran in 1104, and another failed attack on Dyrrachion in 1107.



Miniature of Manuel I Komnenos meeting King Almaric I of Jerusalem, from the *Historia* by William of Tyre, 1460s

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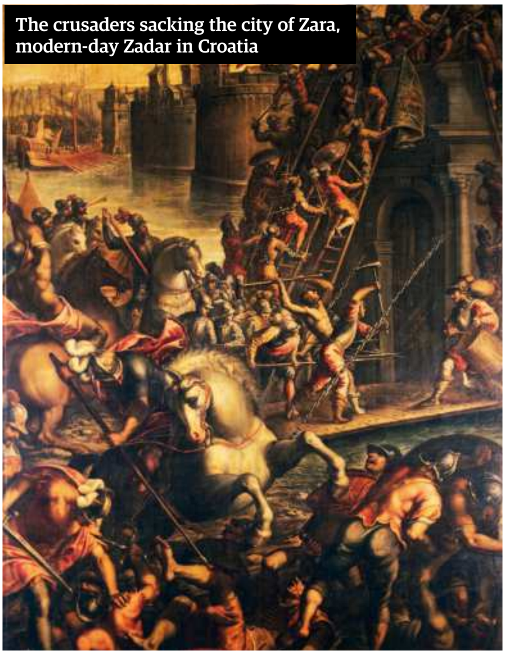

The crusaders sacking the city of Zara, modern-day Zadar in Croatia

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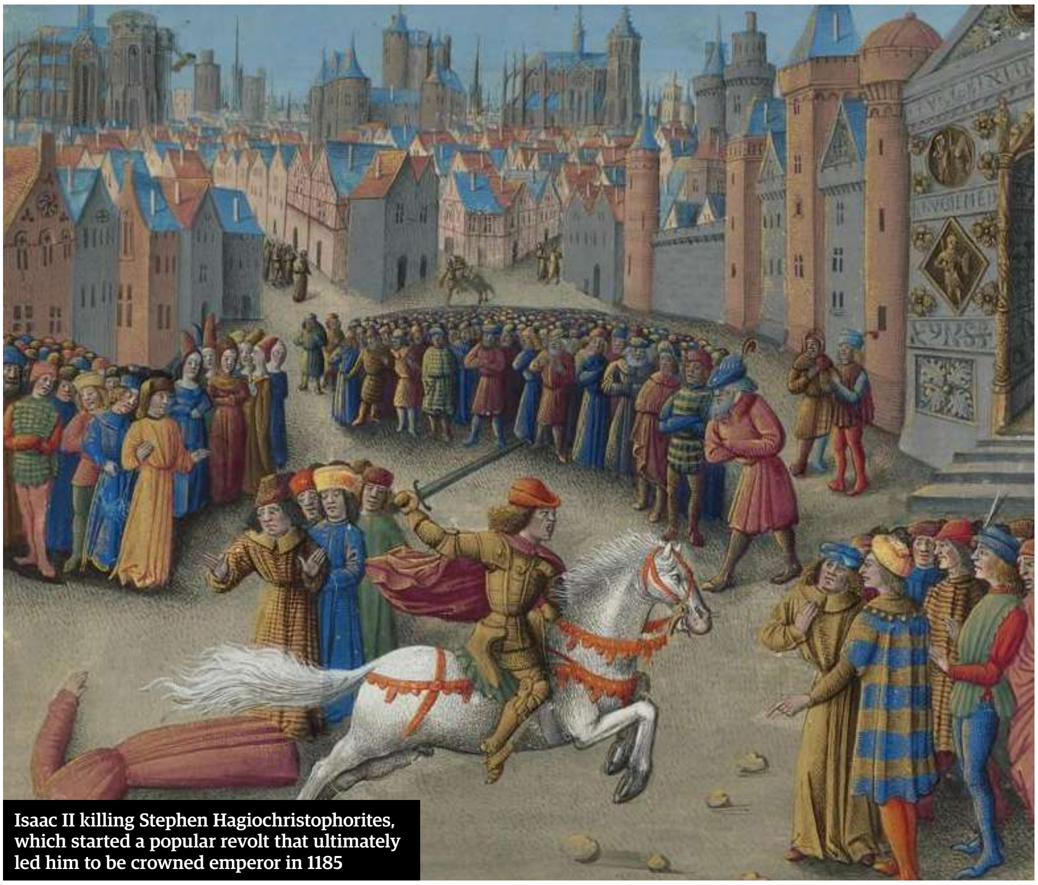
When Alexios heard of the siege he just simply carried on ordering lunch and making little haste, marched to surround Bohemond's forces, and the latter signed a lenient peace treaty in September 1108. It gave Bohemond back control of Antioch, but as a vassal of the Byzantine Empire, and demanded other conquered lands be returned. Having said that, the treaty did not resolve the 'Antioch Question'. Alexios' successor, his son John II Komnenos, was determined to bring the city under direct imperial control and to this extent he extracted homages from Raymond of Poitiers in 1137. John II's successor, Manuel I, also managed to extract oaths of loyalty, again from Raymond of Poitiers when the latter launched a failed attack of Byzantine-controlled cities. Nevertheless, Antioch would never come back under direct formal control of the Byzantine empire again. The city was conquered by the Mamluks in 1268, by which point Constantinople had been sacked by the crusaders.

Events in the crusader states, which were now essentially a western European outpost in the Middle East, were closely monitored in Europe. So when Zengi, the atabeg of Mosul and Aleppo captured Edessa in 1144, Pope Eugenius III launched the Second Crusade. This time, there was no Byzantine communiqué of help for the pope to misinterpret or capitalise on. Nevertheless, with two large armies headed to Constantinople (this time led by heads of state, King Louis VII of France and King Conrad III of Germany) Manuel could not help but get involved. Manuel's actions towards the crusaders were much the same as his grandfather, Alexios I, ferrying the armies individually, not allowing them to group, giving substantial gifts, and extracting oaths. Manuel shared his grandfather's trepidations as to the intentions of the coming crusaders.



Isaac II killing Stephen Hagiochristophorites, which started a popular revolt that ultimately led him to be crowned emperor in 1185

© Wiki

The Second Crusade failed miserably. Conrad III's forces were heavily depleted when a river flooded their camp, and then finished off by Turkish forces at Dorylaeum. Louis VII meanwhile blamed Manuel for the crusade's failure, an accusation that holds some water. In a letter to the king, Manuel led Louis to believe that he was battling the Turks, but agreed a 12-year truce with them after hearing about the crusade. Louis only found about this when he reached Constantinople. More seriously, though, the French King accused Manuel of actively aiding the Turks against the crusaders. Byzantium's longstanding policy to protect itself was through using troops from across the empire, and so Manuel's actions came across as duplicitous, treasonous even to the faith. Manuel's concern was his city, not the Holy Land, and certainly not Edessa. Upon reaching home Louis wanted to launch a crusade against Constantinople but the plan gained little support. News of the Byzantine's supposed treachery reached European shores who were widely blamed for the crusade's humiliating failure.

> More seriously, the French King accused Manuel of actively aiding the Turks against the Crusaders

Manuel took the threat of Western public opinion seriously - an attack could easily be mounted from Italy - and set about improving Byzantine/Latin relations. Extracting acknowledgment as the Guardian of the Holy Places was a key concern for Manuel. When King Baldwin III of Jerusalem requested a Byzantine wife, Manuel pressed his agenda. He sent his niece, the 13-year-old Theodora, along with jewels, silks, 100,000 gold pieces, and an extra 10,000 gold pieces for the wedding. Manuel and Baldwin took to each other, and the latter took the oath. Baldwin's brother, Alamric, also wanted a Byzantine wife when he became king in 1163. Manuel sent his great-niece, Maria, and in return Almaric took the oath, continuing Byzantine suzerainty over the Holy Land.

Manuel was once again allowed to redecorate and build in the Holy Land, a public recognition of his guardianship of the Holy Places, which he further cemented with an expedition against Fatimid Egypt, thought it failed miserably. Nevertheless, Manuel could only go so far. When in 1177 his candidate for the patriarchate of Jerusalem turned up, he was not allowed to officiate in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It would seem no amount of lavish schmoozing could bridge the insurmountable schism.

Manuel's failure in Egypt led the way for another general to take control of the country. An-Nasir Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub (known in the West as Saladin) ended the Fatimid Caliphate in 1171 and used Egypt's resources to finance campaigns into Syria and eventually recapture Jerusalem in 1187. The loss of the Holy Land sent shockwaves throughout Western Christendom, resulting in the Third Crusade launched by Pope Gregory VIII. Three major armies were formed command by

Krak des Chevaliers, a crusader castle in Syria, given to the Knights Hospitallers in 1144

© Getty

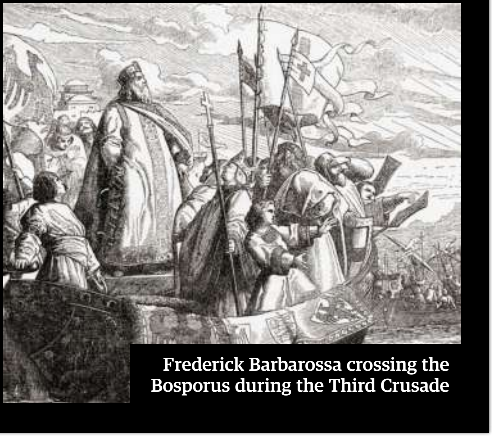
Richard the Lionheart of England, Philip Augustus of France, and Frederick Barbarossa, the Holy Roman Emperor. The crusade failed. Richard the Lionheart's men were defeated at the Battle of Hattin, Philip went home to conquer Richard's French possessions, and Barbarossa drowned.

Nevertheless, despite its failure, the Third Crusade was significant for Byzantium for two reasons. Firstly, Richard the Lionheart and Philip Augustus did not head to Jerusalem, which had fallen into Muslim hands once again, but towards Egypt and Damascus instead. Richard landed in Cyprus, conquering it from Byzantine control in 1191. This was the first time Byzantine controlled land was conquered in a crusade. Latin chroniclers later justified this action with a slew of anti-Byzantine propaganda, calling Isaac II an enemy of Christianity. Secondly, Frederick Barbarossa wanted to launch a crusade against Constantinople, mainly for political reasons. Thus, these three heads of state had changed crusading ideology both in terms of geography and who (and what) could be crusaded against. The full significance of this change would be realised a few years later.

Barbarossa in the Levant

In line with previous emperor's policy towards the crusaders, Isaac II offered passage through Byzantium in return for Barbarossa (who proclaimed himself emperor of the Romans in direct challenge to Isaac) swearing to keep the peace. However, promised Byzantine supplies never materialised, forcing the German army to raid and pillage, thereby raising tensions. Furthermore, pathways were often blocked, leading Barbarossa to believe Isaac was deliberately trying to stall his progress. Then, Barbarossa's son, the duke of Swabia, was alerted a Byzantine army was camped just three miles from his location. Though the army was not a threat, the duke was suspicious and decided to attack, scattering the Byzantine soldiers.

Concurrently Barbarossa received information from Sibylla, the Queen of Jerusalem, who warned that Isaac was conspiring with Saladin. Though the accusation was untrue, it was the straw that broke the camel's back. Barbarossa was furious at Isaac's breach of agreement (not that he liked the emperor anyway) and was convinced to get to Jerusalem, he would have to conquer Constantinople. The coming winter delayed any advance and in the following year the near-war impasse was broken. After protracted negotiations, a treaty in 1190 was concluded, allowing the Germans through Byzantine territories and head towards Jerusalem. In the same year Barbarossa went swimming and drowned, dealing a major blow to the crusade. The duke of Swabia took over but he also died the following year, by which time disease and desertion had swept through the army, significantly cutting their ranks.



Frederick Barbarossa crossing the Bosporus during the Third Crusade

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> “Mourtzoflos deposed Alexios IV, threw him into prison, tried to poison him twice, failed, then had him strangled to death”

The failure to capture Jerusalem during the Third Crusade led Pope Innocent III to call for the Fourth Crusade in 1198. The plan was to congregate in Venice and take a fleet, conquer Egypt, then use its resources to supply the rest of the crusade. An agreement was struck with the Doge of Venice, Enrico Dandolo, to transport 4,500 knights and their horses, 9,000 squires, and 20,000 foot soldiers. More than 35,000 people pledged to take the cross but only 11,000 turned up in Venice. The Venetians had prepared an armada of 500 ships, but as each soldier was to pay their own way, the lack of numbers meant the fleet could not be paid for. Therefore, a deal was struck, in which crusaders would help sack the city of Zara (now Zadar in Croatia) in lieu of payment, which is what they did. Except Zara was a Christian city, leading Innocent III to excommunicate the crusaders and the Venetians. At the same time, another figure made an appearance – a man who would change the course of the crusade altogether.

In 1201 washed up on Europe’s shores a young Byzantine prince, the young Alexios. His uncle, Alexios III, usurped the throne from his brother, Isaac II, then blinded and flung the latter into prison. The young prince was also imprisoned but managed to escape, making his way to Europe where many notables were sympathetic to his cause, including the Doge of Venice. Seeing the crusaders’ debt to the Venetians, he promised to settle their debt and aid the crusading effort if they helped him take Constantinople. The fateful bargain was struck.

Alexios III’s inertia and lack of military skill meant he couldn’t defeat the crusaders despite Constantinople’s legendary defenses and the empire’s superior numbers. The emperor loaded up as much treasure as he could manage, left his wife and relatives, and fled. The Byzantine court took Isaac II out of prison, proclaiming him co-emperor with the young Alexios as Alexios IV. With the new emperors in power they were reminded of the terms of their crowns – bring the empire under the Roman papacy, pay 200,000 silver marks, and a year’s provision for the crusade.

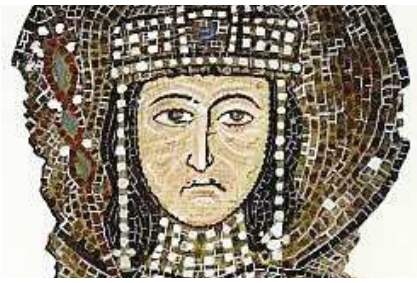
The price of reinstatement, it would turn out, was too steep. Taxation had dwindled and the treasury was empty. Alexios IV was not recognised as emperor beyond the few miles of Constantinople whereas his uncle, Alexios III was, and the latter continued to collect taxation as a result. Alexios IV took to melting down gold from churches to pay the debt, which along with the very conciliatory tone he was forced to maintain to the crusaders, made him deeply unpopular. Clashes between the crusaders and locals ensued, and tensions simmered away. Plans were hatched to replace Alexios and a rival stepped forward: Alexios Doukas Mourtzouflos. On 29 January 1204 he led a coup and deposed Alexios IV, threw him into prison, tried to poison him twice, failed, and then had him strangled to death. The news for his father, Isaac II, was too much and the old man died.

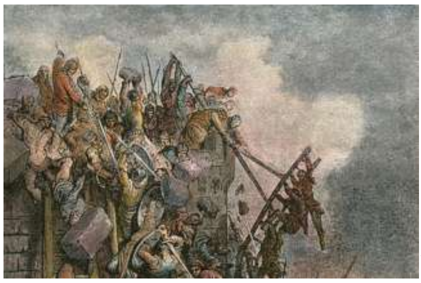
> Emperor Alexios III loaded up as much treasure as he could manage, left his wife and relatives, and fled

Mourtzouflos was crowned emperor, dashing any hope for the crusaders getting their due. Winter was approaching, making any journey by sea hazardous and provisions were running low. Motivated by desperation and greed, in April 1204 the crusaders attacked the city. They faced far less resistance than they expected and the city was sacked. The crusaders raped and murdered their way through Constantinople (most of whom were Christians), plundered its palaces and scorched its houses. The famous bronze horses (which are in fact copper) that adorn St Mark’s Cathedral in Venice were looted from the Hippodrome. Various estimates put the amount looted to around 900,000 marks.

The crusades began with the intention of liberating Jerusalem, and to that extent this aim was largely achieved between 1099 and 1187. During that time and beyond, the Byzantines tried to manage the crusaders using their usually winning combination of lavish gifts and extracting oaths. But actions always speak louder than words. For the Byzantine emperors, their concern was protecting the empire, not recapturing Jerusalem in the name of Catholicism. After all, the crusades were not their idea, and Catholicism was not their belief system.

Byzantine foreign policy was at odds with crusading ideology, a tension which shaped the sequence of events that led to the devastating sack of Constantinople. The city’s leadership was replaced by Latins, who intended on keeping their spoils, and more non-Byzantine settlements grew on former Byzantine lands. Constantinople would survive for another two centuries until the Mongol invasion, but this once great city would continue to remain a shadow of its former self. In a great irony, the crusades destroyed the greatest Christian city in the world.





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Timeline

1071

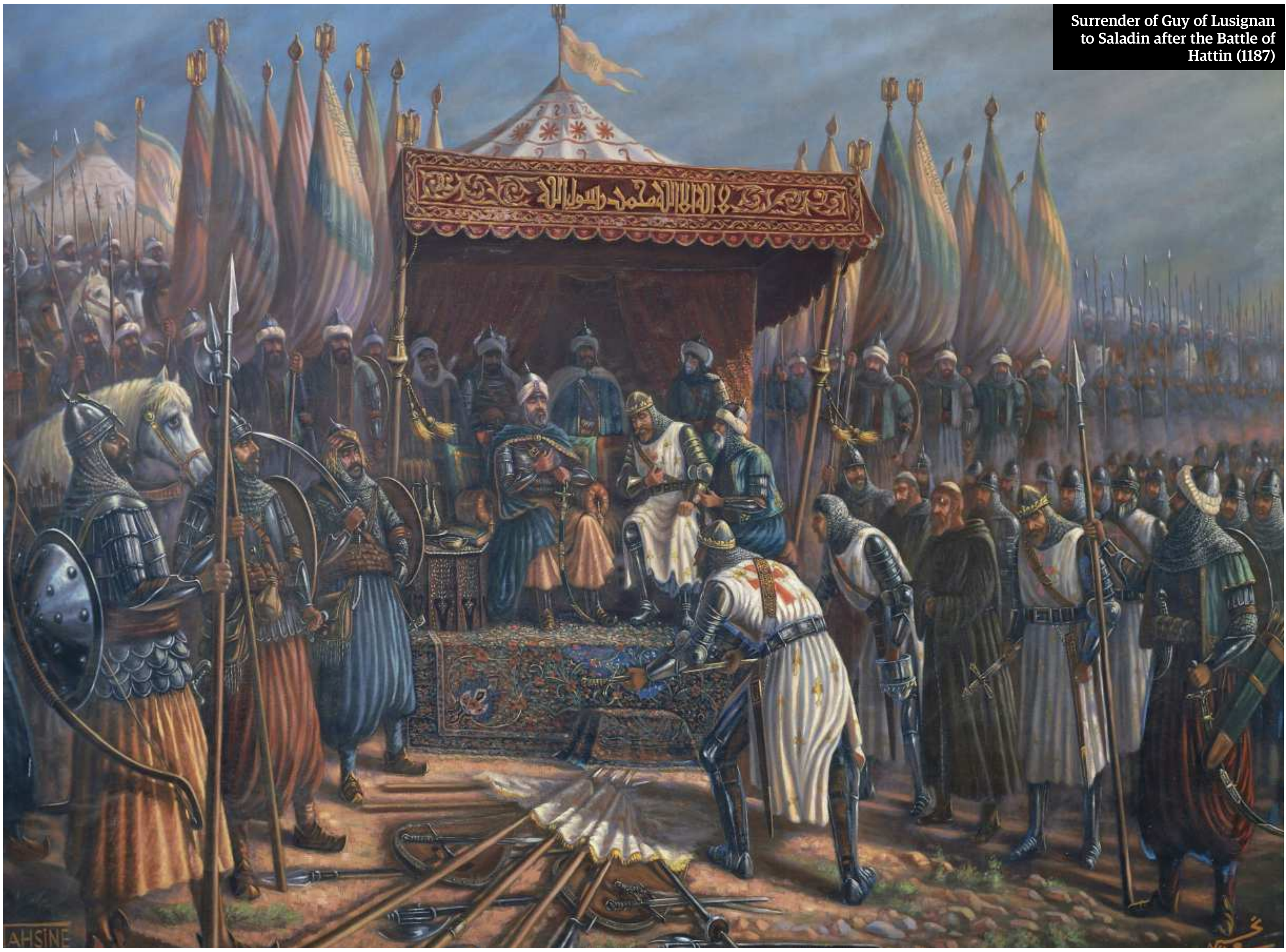
Battle of Manzikert
Battle between the Byzantine Empire and the Seljuk Turks, Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes was defeated and captured by Alp Arslan, and marked the beginning of end of Byzatine controlled Asia Minor.
1071

Alexios I Komnenos becomes emperor of Byzantium
Founder of the Komnenos dynasty, he seized the throne with the help of his family from Nicephorus III and asked Pope Urban II for Latin mercenaries.
1081

Pope Urban II calls for the First Crusade
Motivated by a number of factors from wanting to exert his control of secular rule and a desire to see Jerusalem conquered by Christians, Pope Urban II launches the First Crusade.
1095

Capturing of Antioch
After a gruelling nine month-long siege, the strategic city of Antioch was taken by the crusaders.
1098

Conquering of Jerusalem
Four years after the crusade was initially launched, against all odds the crusaders take Jerusalem, accompanied by an orgy of murder, rape, infanticide, and desecration.
1099



Surrender of Guy of Lusignan to Saladin after the Battle of Hattin (1187)

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1204

Manuel I becomes emperor of Byzantium
The fourth of four sons, Manuel was at his father's (John II) deathbed and just before he died allegedly appointed Manuel his successor, rather than his older brother.
1143

Isaac II becomes emperor of Byzantium
Isaac was a relative of the Komnenos family, and unexpectedly found himself crowned emperor after a short-lived popular revolt, deposing the tyrant Andronicus I.
1185

Saladin reconquers Jerusalem
After taking over Egypt and using it as a base of operations, Saladin brings to an end the 88-year Latin rule of Jerusalem in a largely bloodless campaign.
1187

Fourth Crusade launched
After the failure of the Third Crusade, Pope Innocent III launches the Fourth Crusade.
1198

Young Alexios flees to Europe
The young Alexios escapes imprisonment and flees to Europe, and persuades the crusading leaders to help him overthrow his uncle, Alexios III, thereby taking the crusade to Constantinople.
1201

Sacking of Constantinople
In the desire to be paid, the crusaders laid waste to the Christian city in the East, the spoils of which are housed in European cathedrals and museums today.
1204

THE ROMAN EMPIRE'S LAST STAND

For 600 years, the Ottomans dreamed of seizing Constantinople, the wealthiest city in the world. In 1453, both sides prepared for a decisive showdown

Written by David Crookes

Sultan Mehmed II took his position on a small mound in sight of the walls of the ancient city of Constantinople. Those tasked with defending the city - the stronghold of Orthodox Christianity - from the waves of invaders that threatened her could clearly see his location as they peered across from the city walls over an incredible number of tents situated barely 230 metres (750 feet) away.

The tents were arranged in clusters. At the centre of each was the makeshift home of an officer, on top of each a defiant flag fluttering in the wind against the Sea of Marmara. The 21-year old sultan's ceremonial red-and-gold tent lay further back, its grandeur befitting that of the Ottoman Empire's leader. The sight of some 60,000 soldiers, together with thousands more, helping to keep them well tooled and fed was chilling for the city's inhabitants. For the leader of Constantinople - the Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos - the purpose of the gathering within spitting distance of the city to which he had dedicated his life was clear. War was inevitable, and his forces were outnumbered ten to one.

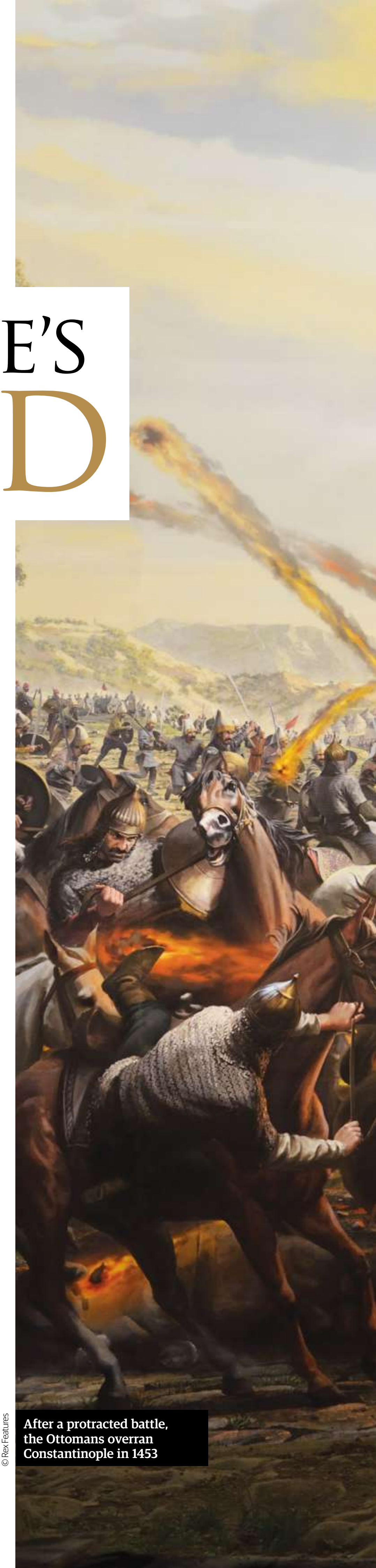
Mehmed was conscious of the need for a swift war, given the logistics involved with keeping such a large army fed. He had made Constantine an offer; surrender the city and he could keep his life and rule in the smaller town of Mystras. The Emperor refused: "To surrender the city to you is beyond my authority or anyone else's who lives in it, for all of us, after taking the mutual decision, shall die out of free will without sparing our lives."

Constantinople was an impregnable walled city that for 1,000 years had been besieged 23 times with just one success

On 6 April 1453, the first attack came, light artillery firing at Constantinople. Soldiers pushed forward, trying to break through the city's walls, but the defenders proved strong. They repelled the invading Ottoman army, causing many casualties. Even as cracks appeared in the walls, and fortresses on Bosphorus were taken, Mehmed realised it wasn't going to be easy to break the city. For that, even greater force was needed, so he called upon something with huge firepower; a weapon that was to shake Constantinople like an earthquake.

Constantine XI understood the importance of his city. It was the gateway to Europe, an impregnable walled city that for 1,000 years had been besieged 23 times with just one success, at the hands of the Christian knights of the Fourth Crusade in 1203. Crucially, Constantinople - so important to the Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantine Empire as it later became known - was the centre for trade and previously the world's largest and richest city. It had stood firm in the face of the Ottoman Empire that had expanded all around it, leaving it isolated in the middle of Europe and Asia.

Constantinople was the focus of much jealousy among rival leaders who wanted to conquer what had become the last outpost of the once-mighty Roman Empire. Followers of Islam had lain siege on Constantinople between 674 and 678, trying again in 717 and 718. Christian Europe feared the fall of Constantinople, believing it would open the way for Islamic dominance. Even though the city saw off the attempted conquest, the death of Islamic martyrs helped make it a holy place, and the need to try again in the future burned deep.



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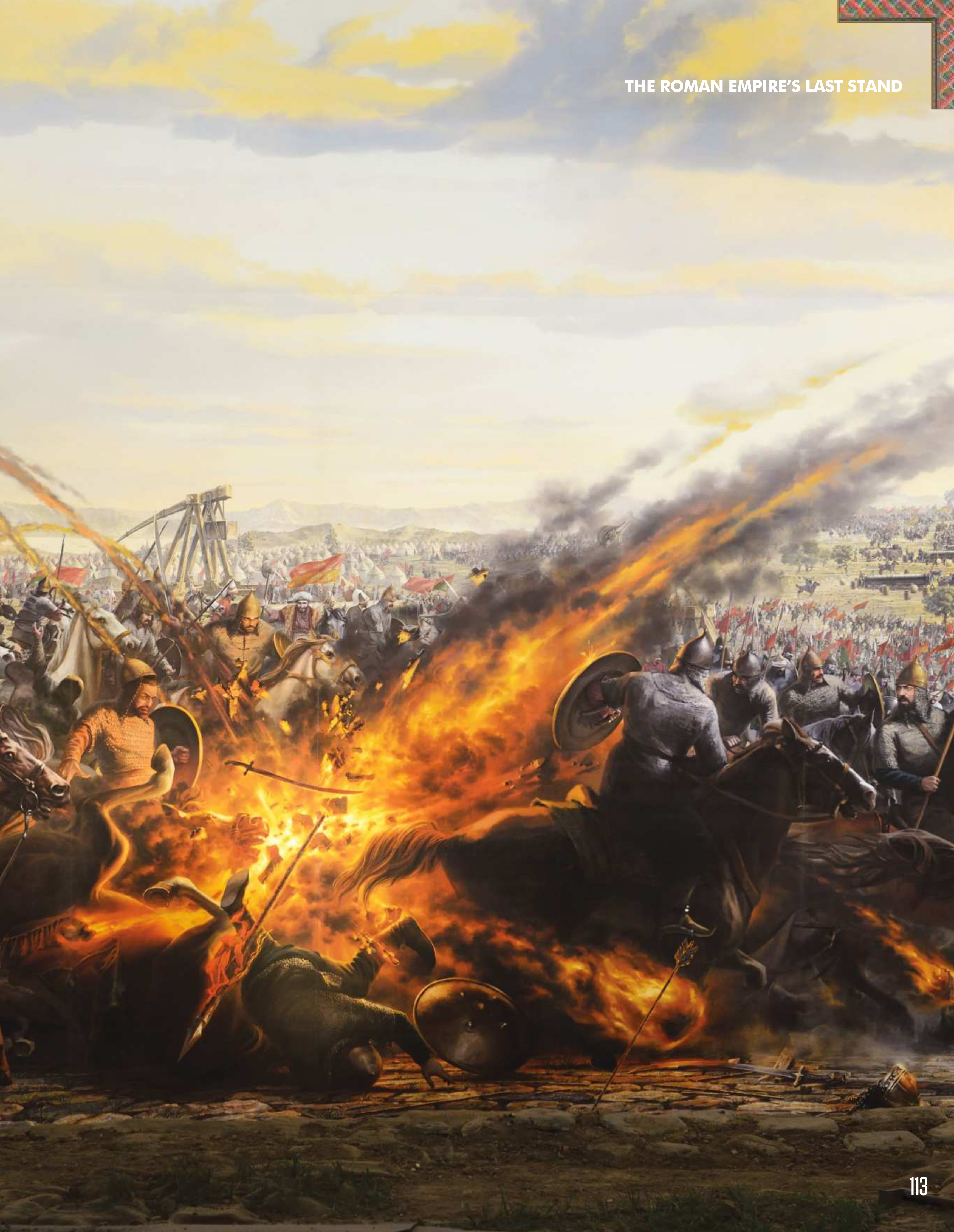
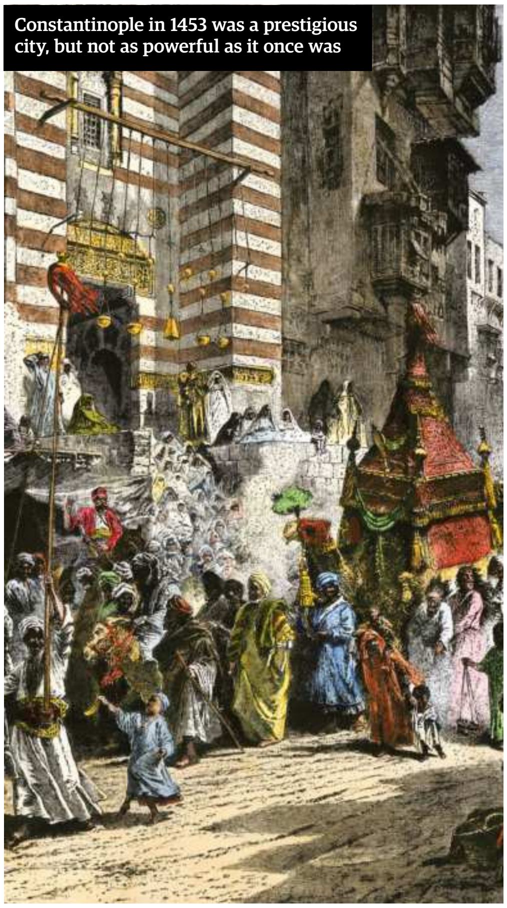
After a protracted battle, the Ottomans overran Constantinople in 1453





Constantinople in 1453 was a prestigious city, but not as powerful as it once was

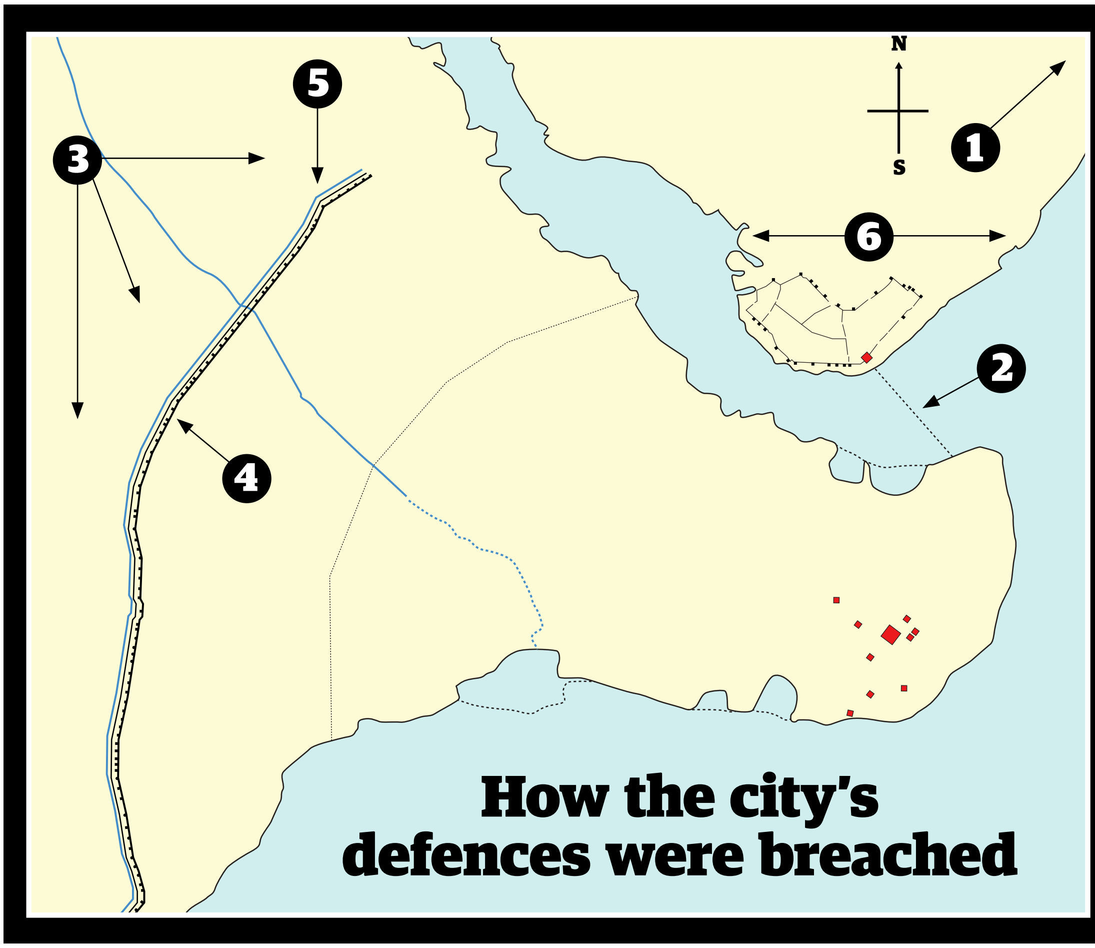
Yet for hundreds of years the main threat to Constantinople as the centre for the Orthodox Church had come from Rome, the centre of the Catholic Church. The Fourth Crusade had devastated Constantinople's power and riches and so, by 1453, it was a pale shadow of its former self. By this point the Byzantine Empire - which at its height had included most of the Mediterranean coast - consisted of Constantinople and a few square miles outside. It might have lost its true power but its location and history meant it was still desirable. Mehmed wanted it badly.

The sultan was determined to succeed where his predecessors had failed. He had come to power thanks to his father, Murat, who had negotiated a ten-year truce with Christian crusaders intent on invasion. Mehmed had come to hold a desire to be the heir to the Roman Empire and extend his influence. He wanted one faith, one empire and one sovereignty in the world and by 1453, the time was right. Constantine XI had none of the power of those that had gone before him and the city, with its population of 100,000, was bankrupt. Constantinople had been paying vast sums to the Ottoman Empire as a way of avoiding invasion but this only served to financially cripple it. Now the enemy was camped on its doorstep, ready to unleash hell. The 49-year-old Constantine knew the chances of his small army holding out were slim but vowed to fight to his last breath.

Constantine had made representations to the Pope, knowing that an attack by the Ottoman forces could only be held off for so long. They needed reinforcements from the West to help tackle the threat. A union between the two churches was celebrated at the end of 1452, but despite the promise of warships, none arrived in the following months and with no help coming, Constantine stepped up the work of repairing and reinforcing the city's walls.

The last outpost of the Roman Empire was ringed by 19 kilometres (12 miles) of perimeter walling, most of it faced the edge of the sea. On the northern side was a chain that had been placed across the mouth of the Golden Horn, the primary inlet leading to a large harbour-like body of water. It prevented enemy ships from sailing past the northern part of Constantinople and was an important part of the city's defences. Constantine's strategy was to put a greater emphasis on the 6.5 kilometres (four miles) of land-locked perimeter wall, but he didn't know about the latest weapon that was about to be unveiled by his savvy enemy.

> For hundreds of years, the main threat to Constantinople came from Rome, the centre of the Catholic Church



How the city's defences were breached

1. Rumeli Hisari (Fortress of Europe)

Winter 1451: Nicknamed Bozaz Kesen (meaning throat-cutter), Mehmed II ordered the building of a magnificent castle with 7.6m (25ft) thick walls. Situated at the narrowest point of the Bosphorus Strait, its inhabitants used it to cut supplies to Constantinople.

2. The chain

2 April 1453: Constantine XI ensured the centuries-old chain was strung across the mouth of the Golden Horn in Constantinople as the Ottoman army camped on their doorstep. It prevented enemy ships from entering the inlet.

3. Enemy camp

2 April 1453: The Ottoman Turks together with a European army camped outside the city walls, the European army to the north of the river, the Janissaries in the middle protecting Mehmed, and the Anatolian army further down.

4. Theodosian Wall

6 April to 29 May 1453: This 6.5km (4mi) stretch of land-locked wall was the primary target for the advancing enemy. They struck it with cannon fire and tried to breach it several times before finally succeeding on 29 May 1453.

5. The moat

The moat had been added in the fifth century and it was an extra barrier between any invading army and the city walls. It was around 20m (66ft) wide and 7m (23ft) deep. The Ottoman Turks tried desperately to fill it and allow for a safe and easy passage.

6. Bypassing the chain

22 April 1453: With the chain blocking access to the Golden Horn, Mehmed II ordered the ships to be carried over land instead. In the dead of night, they were pulled over difficult ground using log rollers and relaunched into the water.

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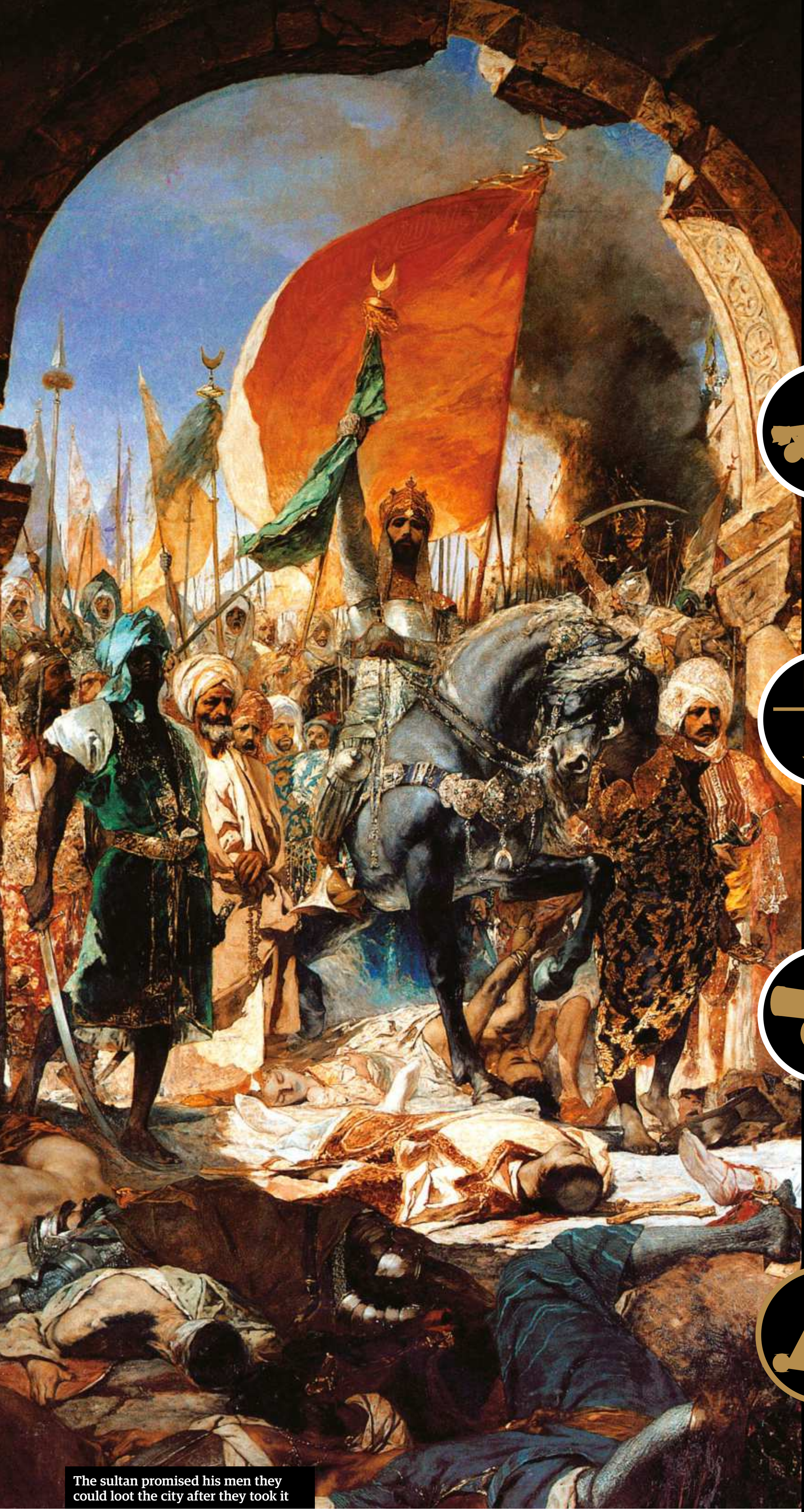


The sultan promised his men they could loot the city after they took it

The evolution of siege weapons

Battering ram

First used: Unknown

Strengths: A part of warfare since ancient history, battering rams have been highly effective in smashing down fortifications over the centuries. They started as simple heavy logs but swinging mechanisms later came into play.

Weaknesses: Although great at impacting stone and brick, against thicker walls they were next to useless. Soldiers would also have to get up close to cause damage. Gunpowder and cannons replaced this clumsy method.

Siege tower

First used: 11th century BCE

Strengths: Moveable siege towers allowed soldiers to scale curtain walls since they were of the same size or higher. In later years, the bottom part would be covered to allow for covert work such as filling in moats.

Weaknesses: Since they were made from wood, they were vulnerable to collapse. In Constantinople, the siege towers were set alight by the defenders using Greek fire – a weapon frequently used by the Byzantines in naval battles.

Cannon

First used: 12th century CE

Strengths: Cannons were highly effective against even the strongest of fortifications as the super-cannons utilised in Constantinople showed. Artillery fire was used heavily in the First World War and lives on in a modern form today.

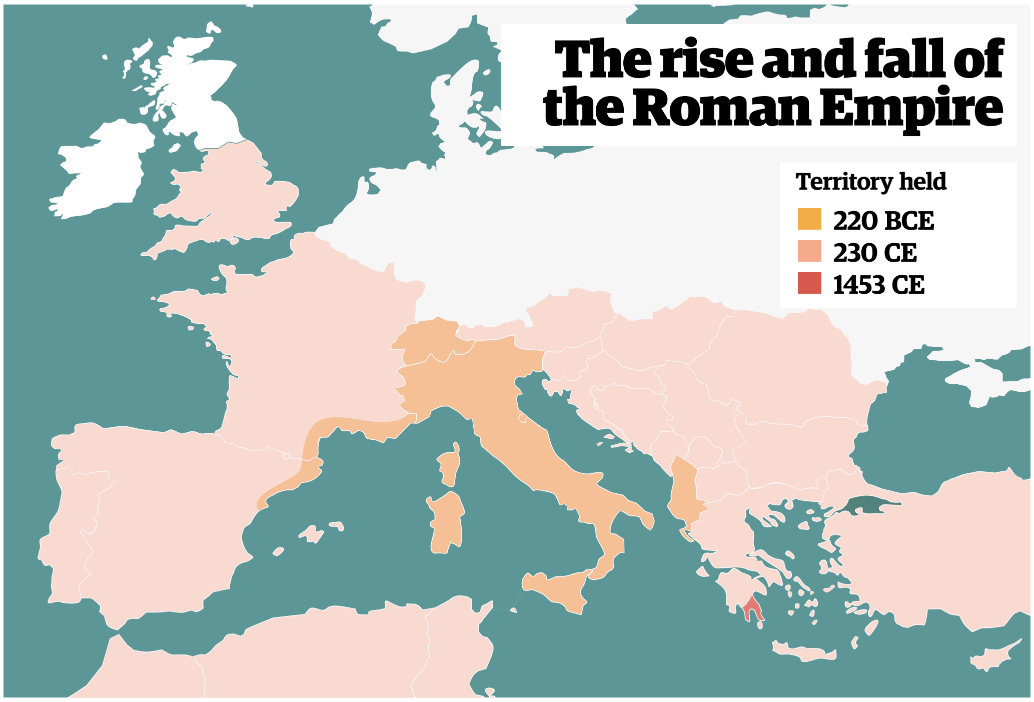
Weaknesses: The need to reload them and ensure they are aimed correctly makes them cumbersome. In Constantinople, it would take some three hours to reload the super-cannon and it was a tiring, manual process.

Catapult

First used: 4th century BCE

Strengths: Catapults were able to propel missiles over the fortified walls of cities and castles and strike death and fear into the heart of a population. They could also be used to smash the walls with large stones

Weaknesses: When defences are strong, the effects of catapults can be neutralised. And no matter what type of catapult was used – some were tension drive, others were spoon-like – they were cumbersome to move and position.



The rise and fall of the Roman Empire

Mehmed enjoyed the discovery of new things and so was rather taken by a proposal to create a cannon larger than any other that had been built. This, he surmised, would be perfect to smash the famous walls of Constantinople.

Gunpowder had been available since around the 11th century - it appears on the Song Dynasty text Wujing Zongyao - so its power was not unknown. The Ottomans' new weapon was different, though. It was devised by an engineer called Orban, who had visited Constantinople from the Kingdom of Hungary and was taken on by Constantine to develop new weaponry. The infrequent payments forced him to seek employment with Mehmed and he promised the sultan he could make a weapon large enough to fire a huge stone that would demolish the city's walls.

Orban was given an abundance of money and the materials to build his super cannon. It took him three months to make the giant weapon, the end result being a monster that was 8.2 metres (27 feet) long and capable of hurling a 272-kilogram (600-pound) stone ball over an incredible 1.6 kilometres (one mile). When it hit the walls of Constantinople, the shock waves were immense. Constantine's men struggled in the face of the onslaught as it smashed into the stone surroundings, causing parts to crumble to the ground, leaving gaping holes in the city's defences. Their respite came in the three hours it took to reload the cannon - they could use the time to repair the wall with mud and other materials to hand. The defenders draped animal skins over the walls, which, together with the mud, helped to cushion subsequent blows to that area.

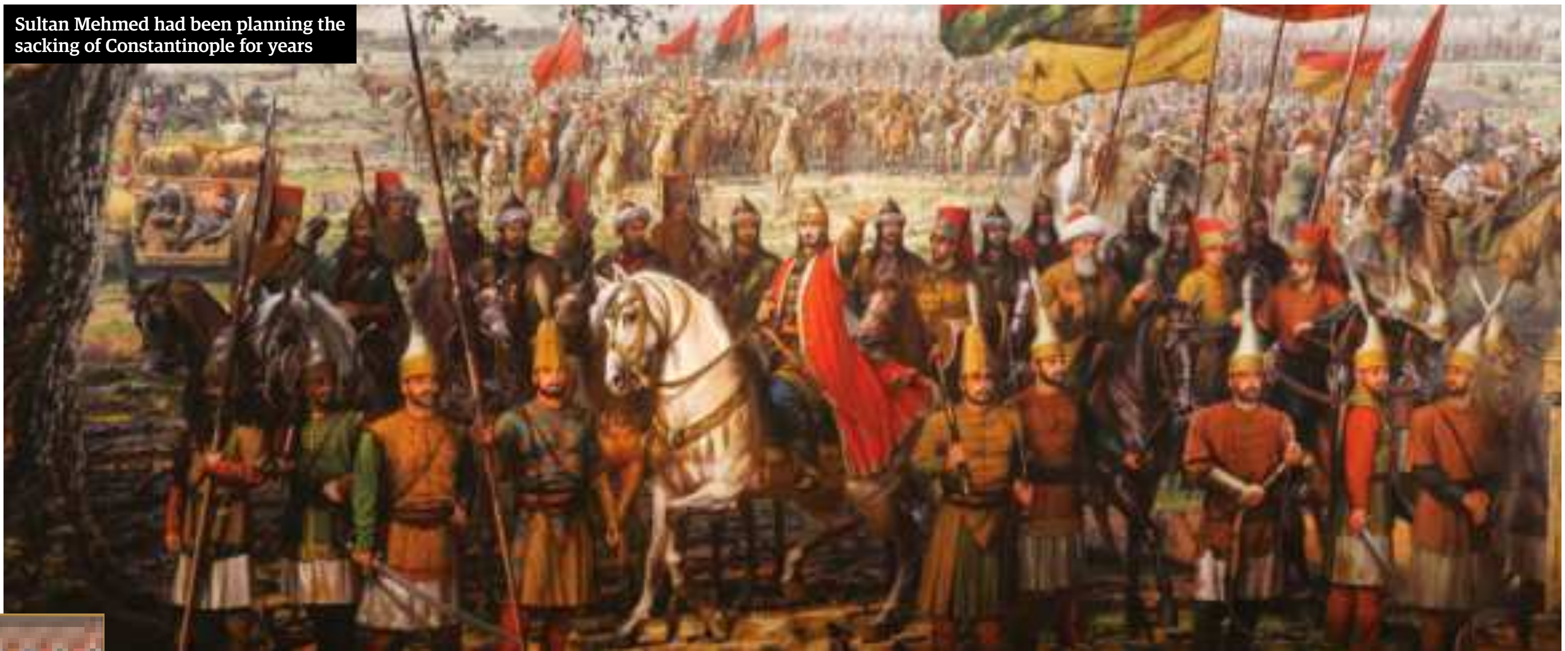
The noise and incredible shaking of the walls as each ball smashed into them caused as much psychological damage as it did physical. The pounding went on for days. Constantine was helped by Giovanni Giustiniani and his army of 700 soldiers from the island of Chios. Giustiniani was instrumental in keeping the walls repaired and Constantinople somehow continued to hold strong. By now, the battle had raged for 12 days.

One of the major aims for Mehmed's army was to fill the moat surrounding the city walls so that access could be quickly gained but Constantine's men emptied them at night. Even so, there had been enough damage and headway for a second stab at taking over Constantinople on 18 April, but this was repelled.

One of the most effective pre-war plans enacted by the Ottomans was the building of a large castle on the European side of Constantinople, close to the city. Finished well in time for the siege, Ottoman's nicknamed it Bogaz Kesen, which translates as the 'throat cutter.' Taking just four months to complete, it could be used to control sea traffic on the Bosphorus strait. The Ottoman Turks could cut supplies to Constantinople by blasting away at defiant ships trying to sail past, using large cannons situated on the water's edge. Constantinople was dangerously isolated.

But just as the Ottoman Turks had made preparations, so too had Constantinople. The defenders had strung a chain across the mouth of the Golden Horn. By blocking access to the waterway, the defenders were able to prevent an onslaught from that direction. The defenders had proved adept at seeing off the Ottomans' naval advances and there had been close ship-to-ship combat during which the Byzantines emerged victorious. Yet cutting off the Golden Horn meant they could concentrate their efforts on defending the land-lying areas of the wall instead.

The sultan's solution was ingenious. Mehmed decided the answer would be to haul the ships over land from the sea to the water cut off by the chain. Soldiers and oxen pulled at the ships, sending them over pre-laid rollers greased with animal fat. Scores of ships were hauled over in a mammoth overnight task. Surprised and aghast, the defenders were unsure what to do. The ships were now able to fire at the scantly guarded wall to the side of the Golden Horn. Within hours, great damage was being caused and Mehmed showed his ruthless side. When a group of defenders managed to escape from one sunken ship, Mehmed's punishment was to have them impaled.



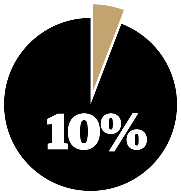
Sultan Mehmed had been planning the sacking of Constantinople for years

Historic cities sacked

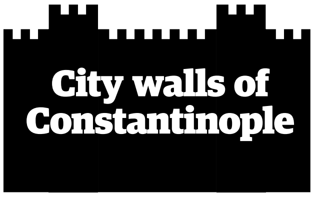
Constantinople

Ottoman forces finally broke through the robust city walls and sturdy defences and gained access to Constantinople. Amid the deafening sound, they slew hundreds of men, captured women and children and looted the city for promised riches.

How much of it was destroyed?



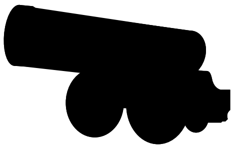
Main landmark or building destroyed



Death toll

4,000

Main weapon used



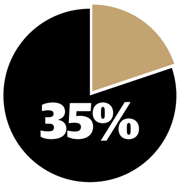
Cannon

29 MAY 1453

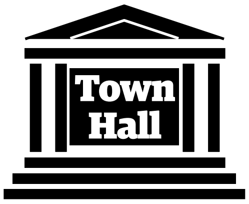
Antwerp

With Spain declared bankrupt, the Tercio was angry at not being paid and so swept into Antwerp with the intention of looting. Over three days, they stole large numbers of items and ended up setting fire to the city, completely destroying the wealthiest quarter.

How much of it was destroyed?



Main landmark or building destroyed



Death toll

8,000

Main weapon used

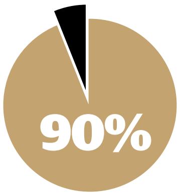
Fire

4 NOV 1576

Rome

The troops of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V became angry at not being paid. In the end more than 34,000 of them mutinied and headed for Rome. Churches and monasteries were looted and destroyed. Priests, monks and nuns were among those slaughtered in the revolt.

How much of it was destroyed?



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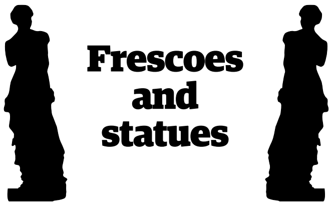


Death toll

12,000

Main weapon used

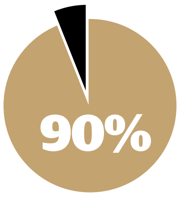
Swords

6 MAY 1527

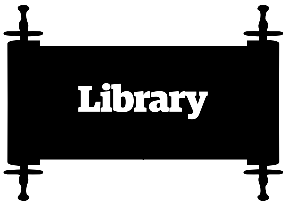
Baghdad

Around 150,000 Mongols arrived in Baghdad and, on 13 February, entered the city, destroying and pillaging property for a week. One of the Mongols' biggest crimes was the soaking of hundreds of books in the Tigris River, but their butchery was also severe.

How much of it was destroyed?



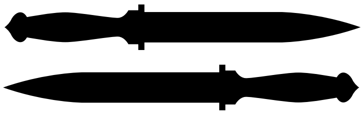
Main landmark or building destroyed



Death toll

1,000,000

Main weapon used



Knives

13 FEB 1258

The high-stakes game of cat and mouse continued and Mehmed ordered the Ottomans to mine under the city. On 16 May, Christian soldiers heard underground activity and went to investigate. Their discovery of miners put them on high alert and, having sorted the initial problem, they tried to think up effective ways to spot further attempts. John Grant, a Scotsman who had found himself in Constantinople, recommended placing buckets of water around the walls of the city. A ripple on the surface of the water would alert them to possible mining. It worked.

The attacks may have been repelled but the defenders were getting tired and their walls were a mess. On 27 May, Mehmed made the decision to throw everything at the city. Ottoman forces bombarded the walls relentlessly, causing heavy damage. They were fast and furious, giving the defenders little time to make repairs. Mehmed then prepared his men to march forward. They were, he said, not to touch the structure of the city - he wanted Constantinople to remain as intact as possible so that it could form his capital. They could loot and enslave, though. With this promise, the army spent 28 May getting ready, praying, resting and running through their tactics.

Constantine prepared his city, encouraged his soldiers to fight to the last man and vowed to defend his city to the death. There were just 4,000 men left to hold Constantinople - half that at the start of the siege. On 29 May, after a 47-day siege, the invaders surged forward, scaling the walls. They were pushed back by the defenders who knocked away ladders and used hot oil to scald the invaders. Two waves of attack were repelled.

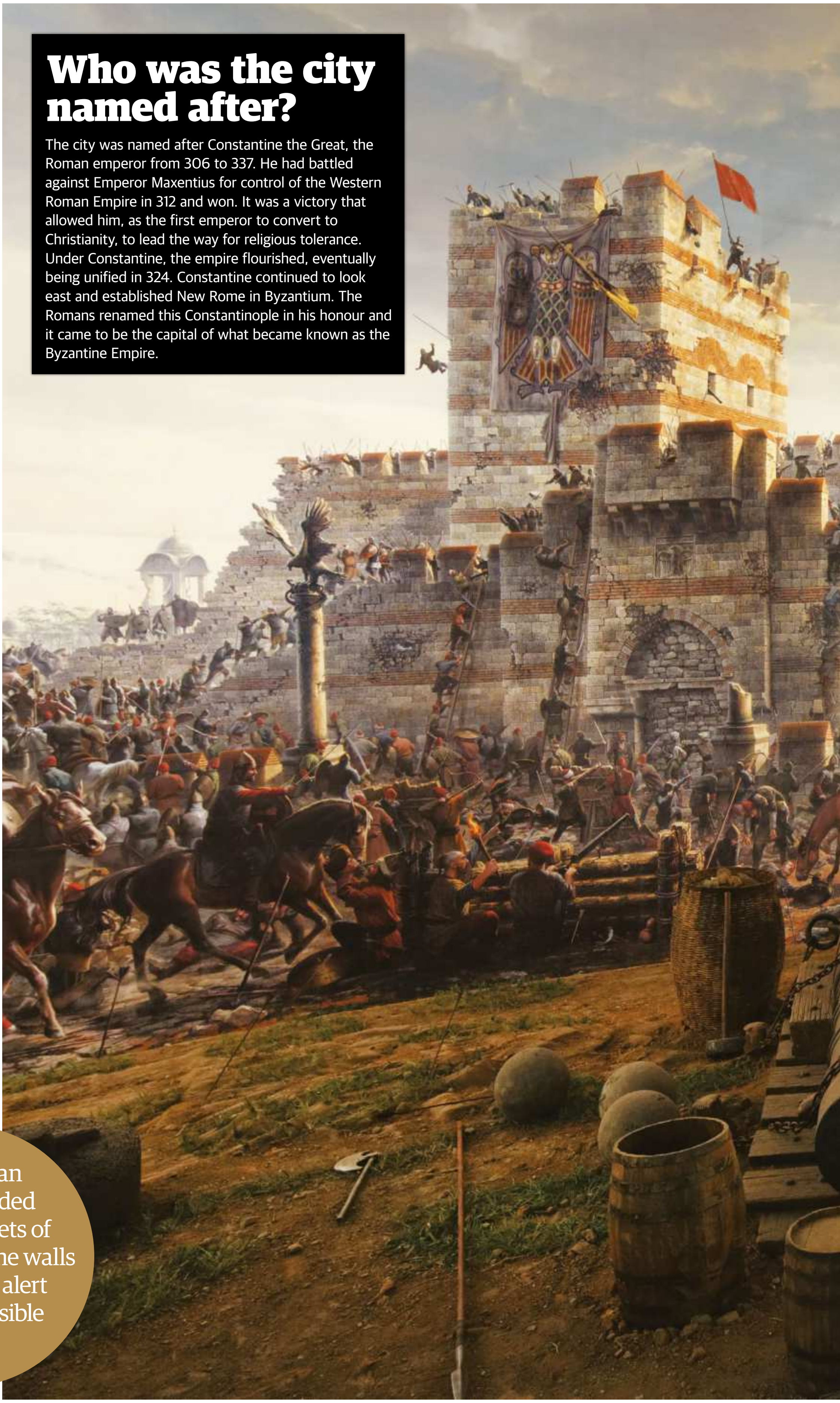
But Mehmed's Janissaries - Christians picked up by the Ottomans as children and trained as fighters - broke through, their elite training enabling them to breech the walls after numerous hours of fighting. There were hand-to-hand battles in the narrow streets of the city. The defenders knew the city would soon be overpowered. Screams filled the night air. As Ottoman soldiers poured into Constantinople, the city was overwhelmed.

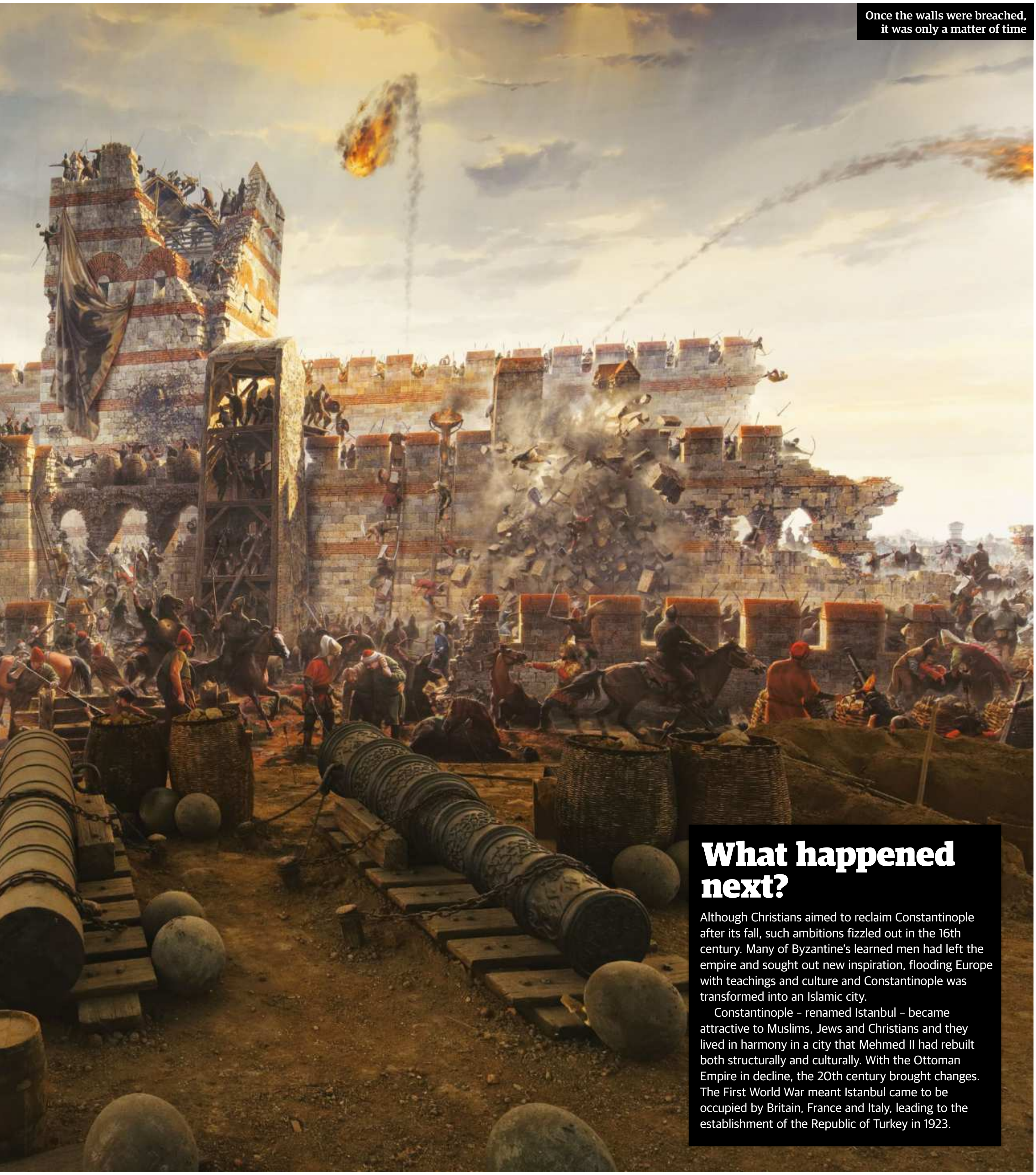
The Ottomans flung open the great bronze doors of Haghia Sophia and massacred large numbers of worshippers. With priests dying by the altar and with a vast number of prisoners being rounded up, the end was upon the city. Their emperor tore off his imperial ornaments so he looked like any normal soldier, saying, "The city is fallen and I am still alive", and charging to his death. The invaders tied up any enemy they didn't slaughter, grabbed women and fought over the most attractive of them. Children were led into slavery and the city was ransacked of what little it had left. After more than 1,000 years of a glorious Constantinople, the last outpost of the Roman Empire was no more.

A Scotsman recommended placing buckets of water around the walls of the city to alert them to possible mining

Who was the city named after?

The city was named after Constantine the Great, the Roman emperor from 306 to 337. He had battled against Emperor Maxentius for control of the Western Roman Empire in 312 and won. It was a victory that allowed him, as the first emperor to convert to Christianity, to lead the way for religious tolerance. Under Constantine, the empire flourished, eventually being unified in 324. Constantine continued to look east and established New Rome in Byzantium. The Romans renamed this Constantinople in his honour and it came to be the capital of what became known as the Byzantine Empire.





Once the walls were breached, it was only a matter of time

What happened next?

Although Christians aimed to reclaim Constantinople after its fall, such ambitions fizzled out in the 16th century. Many of Byzantine's learned men had left the empire and sought out new inspiration, flooding Europe with teachings and culture and Constantinople was transformed into an Islamic city.

Constantinople – renamed Istanbul – became attractive to Muslims, Jews and Christians and they lived in harmony in a city that Mehmed II had rebuilt both structurally and culturally. With the Ottoman Empire in decline, the 20th century brought changes. The First World War meant Istanbul came to be occupied by Britain, France and Italy, leading to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

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WHAT DID THE BYZANTINES DO FOR US?

The Byzantine legacy – from the Renaissance to religion, language, law and… forks

Written by Nikos Tzoumerkas

The Byzantine Empire, or the Roman Empire, as the Byzantines called themselves, lasted for more than 1,000 years. Its impact on the contemporary world throughout modern history, long after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, remains evident through its achievements, lasting legacy and influence. Indeed, the Byzantines live on not only through their inventions, which are still being used today, but also other aspects of Byzantine life that have since been adopted by modern countries, such as symbols and art styles.

One of the greatest intellectual movements in human history - which the Byzantines contributed greatly to - was the Renaissance, the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity. In the final years before the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans, many Byzantines fled to the West to escape the foreseeable havoc. Among those émigrés were educated individuals with an immaculate knowledge of Greek, and they were willing to disseminate it to the Western world. In turn, the Italian audience received them gladly.

Indeed, the knowledge of Greek these scholars brought was much craved in the West, as scholars had become increasingly interested in ancient Greek texts. As such, the Byzantine immigrants taught in universities and privately. Their greatest achievement, however, came in translating many of the ancient Greek texts into Latin, the result being that the writings of Plato, Aristotle and others suddenly became easily accessible.

The modern person might think of Byzantium as something dark, backwards and even corrupted. But this assessment is far from the truth. The Byzantines created many things that are taken for granted today. One of the most important developments was that of hospitals, without which medical care would not be what is is today. The first hospital in the modern sense was built around 372-379, in Cappadocia, by Basil of Caesarea. Previous institutions that resembled hospitals had admitted people who were sick, but those did not try to cure patients. Instead, individuals essentially went to hospital for an early form of palliative care to be administered before death. By contrast, Basil's institution had doctors, a leprosarium and aimed to heal patients rather than simply offer them shelter.

Byzantine hospitals were known as 'xenon', or houses for strangers, the biggest being Constantinople's Pantocrator

Soon after this Cappadocian innovation, hospitals started being built around the empire, through private donations or through the Church and its charity. The Byzantines evolved the idea of hospitals further in the following centuries. The most well-known Byzantine hospital was housed in the monastery of Pantokrator and it was one of the first philanthropic institutions worldwide. In this hospital, records of medical treatments were kept by physicians, and two doctors would examine patients and monitor their treatments. Furthermore, the senior doctors would listen to patient's complaints. Overall, Byzantine hospitals offered a humane environment that had been absent until then, and helped shaped the modern interpretation of healthcare.

Another Byzantine medical breakthrough was the separation of conjoined twins in

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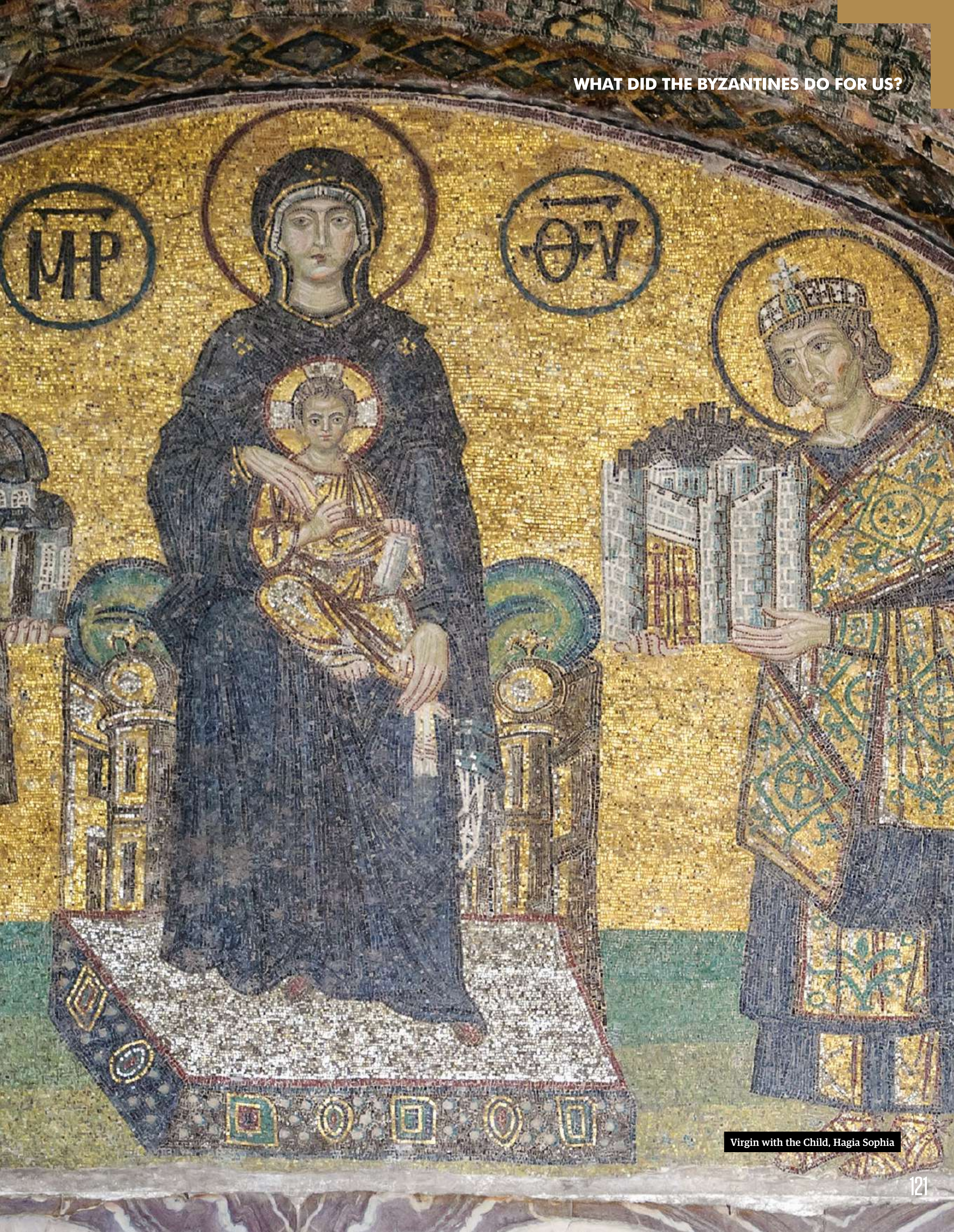


Virgin with the Child, Hagia Sophia

The Christianisation of the Russians

Why did the Russians decide to convert to Eastern Orthodox Christianity?

The *Russian Primary Chronicle*, written in the first half of the 12th Century, offers a fascinating story about the Christianisation of the nation. The vast majority of Russians were pagan until 988 CE, when Vladimir I, the prince of Kiev, converted to Christianity and made it the official religion of his state.

According to the *Primary Chronicle*, Vladimir sent the wisest men of the kingdom to neighbouring kingdoms and empires in order to find out which religion was the best. When they returned, Vladimir was informed that the Muslims of Volga Bulgaria did not eat pork and did not consume alcohol. The king concluded that would be a miserable life for Russians, who loved to drink. He rejected Judaism, too, because he thought that if they had God's support, their holy city Jerusalem would have been under their occupation.

The remaining choice was Christianity, but next Vladimir had to decide which denomination to follow. The men he sent to Germany reported that the churches there were not as glorious as they expected and they could not find any beauty in them. However, they found exactly what they wanted in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. After attending Sunday Mass, they reported to Vladimir they "no longer knew whether they were in heaven or on Earth... nor such beauty, and we know not how to tell of it". As a result, Vladimir chose to convert to the Byzantine form of Christianity.

© Wiki/ Messir

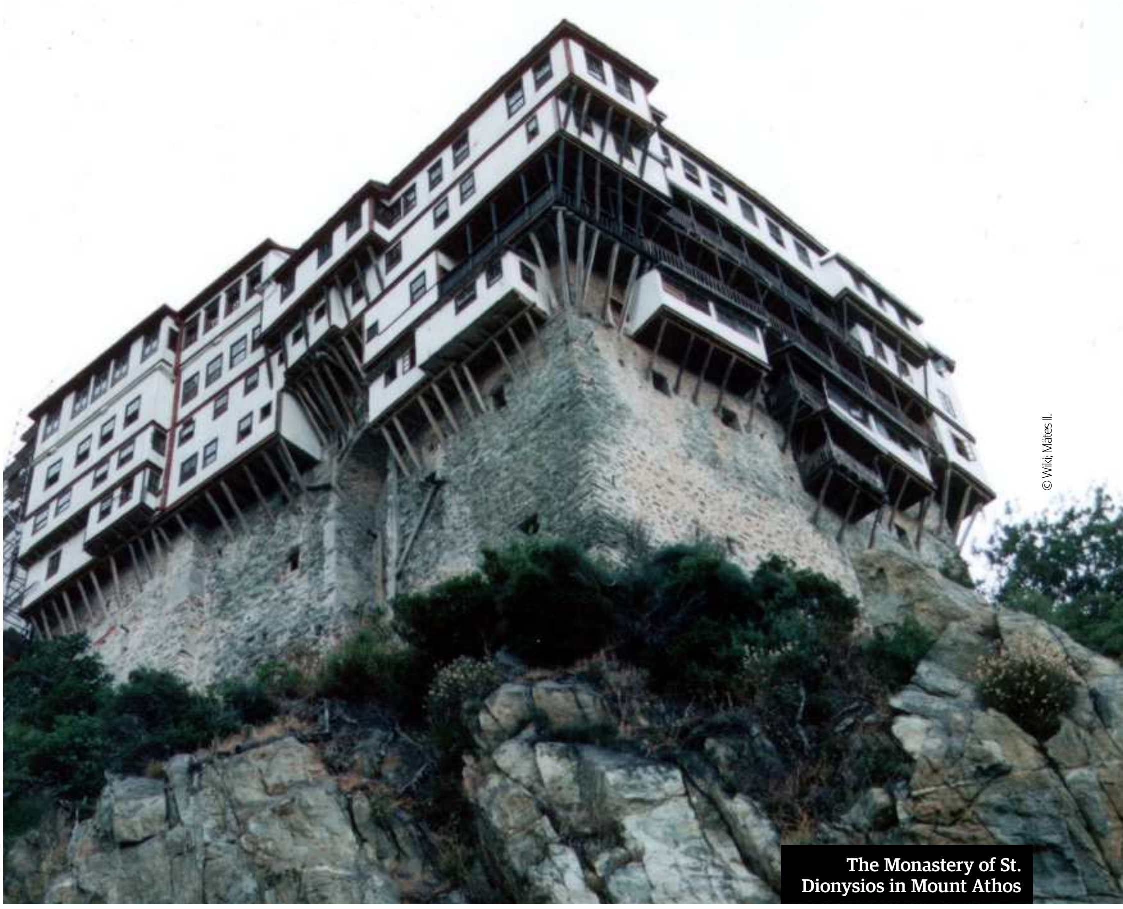
Vladimir the Great from St. Petersburg

Constantinople in the 10th Century. This story is reproduced in many chronicles of the period. When one of the conjoined twins died, some surgeons in Constantinople attempted to remove the body of the dead twin. The surgery was partially successful, as the second twin survived the procedure, but died three days later. Even though he died, the result was so unexpected and spectacular that it was discussed by historians as a huge achievement for the next two centuries. This medical breakthrough was only repeated seven centuries later, in Germany, in a modern medical environment.

One of the distinctive characteristics of the Byzantines was their reluctance to wage wars. This statement sounds strange given the multiple campaigns against the Arabs and other enemies of the empire. But these were usually not done for mere glory. The eminent historian Sir Steven Runciman noticed that "ever since our rough crusading forefathers first saw Constantinople and met, to their contemptuous disgust, a society where everyone read and wrote, ate food with forks and preferred diplomacy to war, it has been fashionable to pass the Byzantines by with scorn and to use their name as synonymous with decadence". In the West, there was a deep belief that the Byzantines were not warlike people. However, despite their resistance to warfare, they invented fierce weapons to counter their enemies. One of the most famous was the Greek Fire, an incendiary similar to napalm. Its exact composition remains a mystery for historians to solve. This fearful weapon was shot from tubes and siphons, until the Byzantines realised that they could also put it in containers and throw it. You could say that is how the first grenade was invented. Grenades are still being used in modern warfare today, but the first one was created by the Byzantines and it resembled the contemporary Molotov cocktail. It was shot either by hand or with the help of tubular projectors. Indeed, for an empire that despised war, it had in its possession the secret to one of the deadliest weapons of the age. Only centuries later would other empires start using their own versions of the Greek fire, which was reportedly not as effective.

Modern law has its origins in the Eastern Roman Empire, and it is greatly indebted to one specific legal collection, the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*. In 528AD, Justinian ordered the compilation of one Codex that would cut the length of litigation and reduce the complexity of the existing legal texts. This Code would act as the safeguard of the state, and it would be a "single authoritative recompilation" under Justinian's name, thus it would render his

> Justinian's *Corpus Iuris Civilis* simplified the law by consolidating all rulings in one code. Any excluded edict was considered repealed



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The Monastery of St. Dionysios in Mount Athos

The crown of Constantine Monomachos

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"Justinian's Code formed the basis for one of the most important legal reforms of modern history – the Napoleonic Code"

legacy eternal and his authority absolute. His legacy was indeed to be eternal, as this Code set the foundations for modern European legal systems.

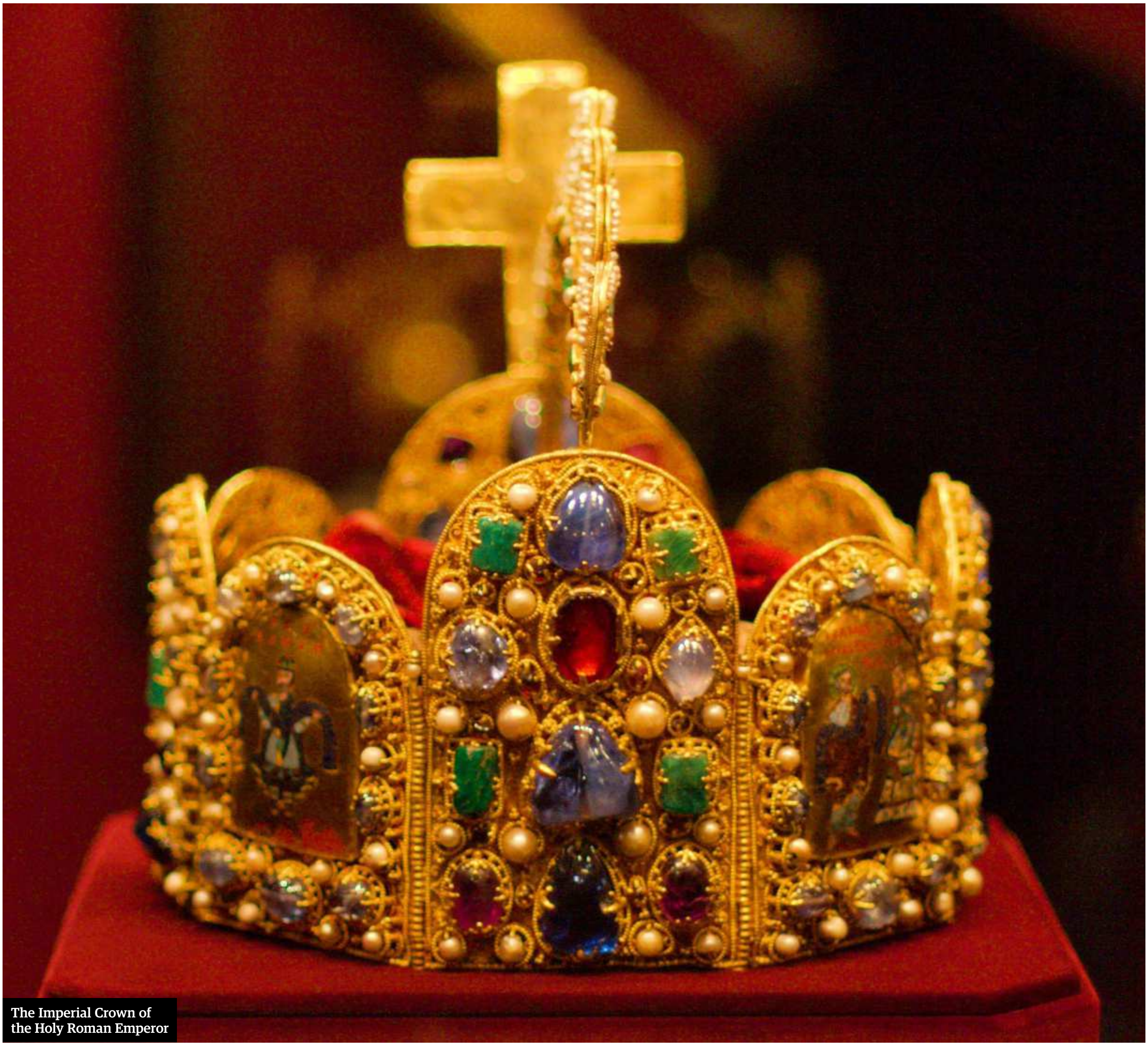
The majority of Western European countries have heavily drawn on Justinian's legislation, which has been reworked and transformed in order to fit the modern standards of justice. The *Corpus Iuris Civilis* was disseminated in Italy towards the end of the 11th Century and was taught in the University of Bologna, the first European University. Later, in the 16th Century, the Code was published in Paris in two lengthy volumes and formed the basis for one of the most important legal reforms of modern history – the Napoleonic Code established in 1804 shortly after the French Revolution.

During the 19th and 20th Century, the Code was translated into other European languages, such as English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. Its authority and influence is undeniable, and it comes mainly from the fact that Justinian's legislation was viewed by the majority of European states as a way to create a moral and equal society, and to improve the relationship between monarchs and their subjects.

However, the Byzantine legacy and influence goes beyond medical or military inventions and scholarly achievements. Their symbols were adopted by other empires, modern countries and even sports clubs. The famous double-headed eagle is the main example. Adopted by Byzantium, it later became the symbol of imperial authority of the Habsburg monarchs. Many Balkan countries have the double-headed eagle on their flags, such as Albania and Serbia. Montenegro, meanwhile, changed its flag in 2004, re-adding the symbol that had been its coat of arms before. Similarly, Russia adopted it to strengthen its claims of succession to the Byzantine Empire after the latter's fall. The Greek Orthodox Church is another example of adoption of the symbol, which proves how strong Byzantine symbolism can be, especially when it fits modern political agendas and claims.

After the fall of Constantinople, many empires and institutions attempted to claim succession and legitimise themselves. The medieval roots of a number of fledgling countries were highlighted in the 19th Century, when the emerging Balkan countries were struggling for independence. The desire to claim the glitz and glamour of the Byzantine era led Simeon I of Bulgaria (893-927) to adopt the title "Tsar of Bulgarians and Emperor of Romans". Stefan Dušan (1331-1355), the first king of the Serbian Empire, used the title "Emperor of the Serbs and Greeks and Bulgarians". In fact, Dušan was so obsessed with the title that in his legal code he claimed direct lineage to Constantine the Great, the first Eastern Roman emperor.

But the double-headed eagle serves another purpose apart from being used as a symbol of political legitimisation. It has been adopted across



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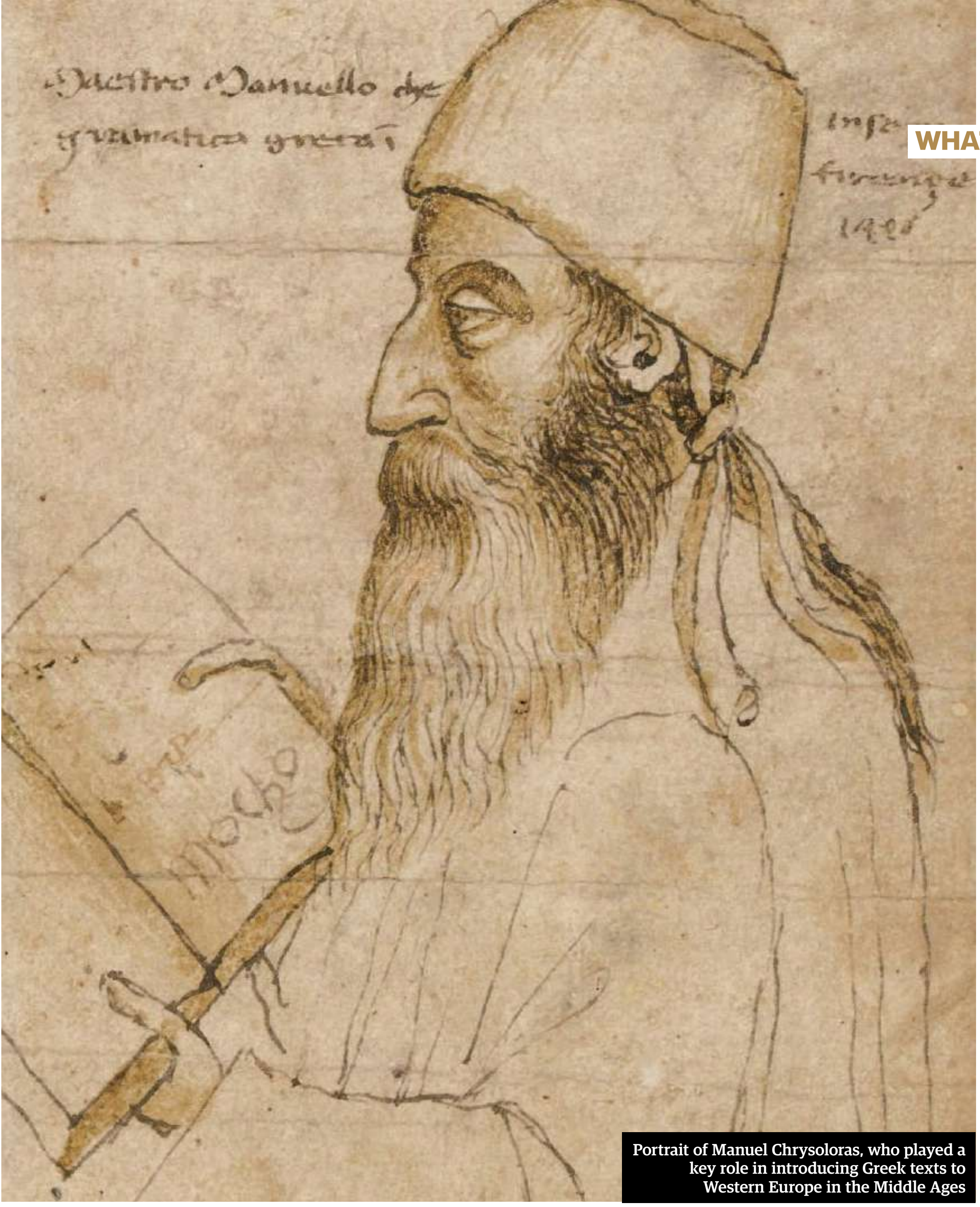
The Imperial Crown of the Holy Roman Emperor

> "The German people were astounded by Theophano's fork – the traditional way of eating was with dagger and hands"

Europe as a sports clubs insignia. Some examples include the Dutch football club SBV Vitesse, English club AFC Wimbledon and Scotland's St. Johnstone FC. In Turkey and Greece, there are more teams with the symbol – the most famous Turkish club being Konyaspor, who play in the Süper Lig, Turkey's best league, while Greek clubs PAOK and AEK also use the double-headed eagle.

In the West, evident Byzantine influence includes the protocol followed by the Habsburgs. The Imperial Crown of the Holy Roman Empire was used by the Holy Roman Emperors from late 11th Century to the dissolution of the empire in 1806. The crown has green and blue precious stones, which were used by the Byzantine emperors following the imperial protocol. Depictions of the Holy Roman Emperors changed from profile to portrait, in order to resemble the Byzantine art style. Similarly, western emperors appear kneeling in front of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and other Christian figures in Gospels. In the Golden Gospels of Henry III, Henry and his wife Agnes receive blessings from the Virgin Mary with the Speyer Cathedral on the background.



Portrait of Manuel Chrysoloras, who played a key role in introducing Greek texts to Western Europe in the Middle Ages

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Through marriages with Byzantine princesses, the Western kingdoms came in closer touch with the Byzantine culture and traditions. At the same time, it confirmed the huge cultural gap between the two neighbouring worlds. The emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Otto I, had asked for a Byzantine princess to be married to his son Otto II, in order to sign a treaty between the two empires. In 972, the Byzantine emperor John Tzimiskes agreed to send his niece Theophano to Otto, which was considered a huge diplomatic success for the Western world. In their minds, Byzantium was the very cornerstone of sophistication and prestige. As such, her arrival was glorious – she had an exceptional escort and brought an invaluable treasure from Constantinople.

Interestingly, Theophano introduced the fork to the Holy Roman Empire, because the Germans wondered what she was using when they saw her eating. As contemporary chronicles recite, the local people were astounded when she "used a golden double prong to bring food to her mouth" as the traditional German way of eating was with dagger and hands.

Apart from her peculiar way of eating food, Theophano had other habits rendering her unlikeable to Western European people. The Byzantine princess wanted to bathe daily, was dressed in silks and luxurious jewellery, plus she was considered chatty – a behaviour that Germanic people did not approve of. Her son Otto III, who reigned from 996 to 1002, loved Greek and Roman cultures because of his mother's influence. Towards the end of his short life, he started to despise his German subjects whom he perceived as uncivilised and unworthy. Otto showed his love and respect for the Byzantine protocol, which he adopted for his own court.

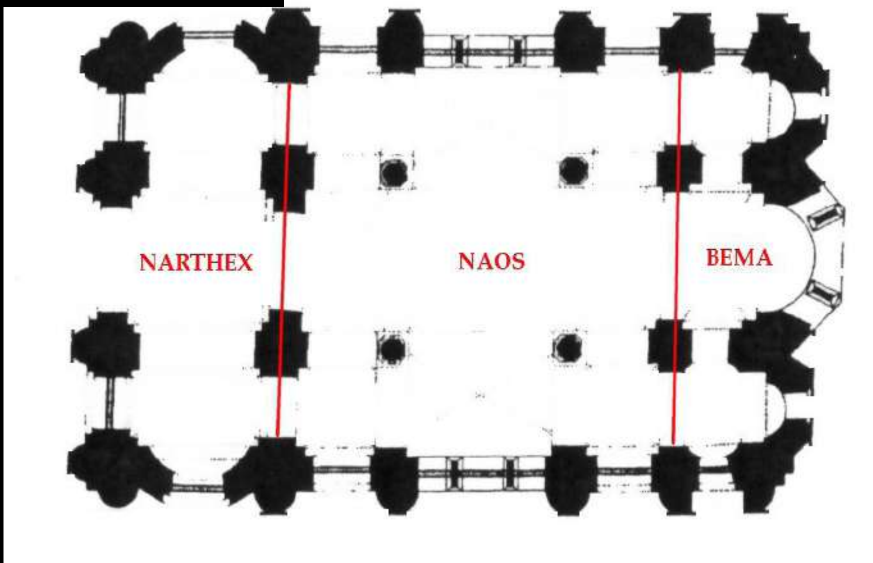
New architectural developments

The Byzantine legacy in architecture and how it is still used for churches and even mosques

The Byzantines developed many new styles of architecture in order to build ever more magnificent edifices. One of the most important innovations was that of the pendentive dome. Even though it had existed since the Roman times, the first fully developed example survives from the reconstruction of Hagia Sophia in 563. In 558, an earthquake caused the dome to collapse, so five years later the pendentive dome was formed as a solution to the problem of the weight of the enormous dome.

This innovative approach allowed the circular dome to be built on top of a rectangular floor plan. During the Middle Byzantine period, churches evolved from the traditional basilica to the type known as cross in square. The name derives from the shape of the inner divisions, which form a cross. In the western part of the church is the narthex, the entrance to the main part of the edifice, while the eastern part is the sanctuary, separated from the rest of the church by an iconostasis. The design proved so impressive that it was imitated by a plethora of Turkish mosques in the centuries that followed the fall of Constantinople, and it remains in use today.

The Byzantine church of Myrelaion in Constantinople, built in cross in square type



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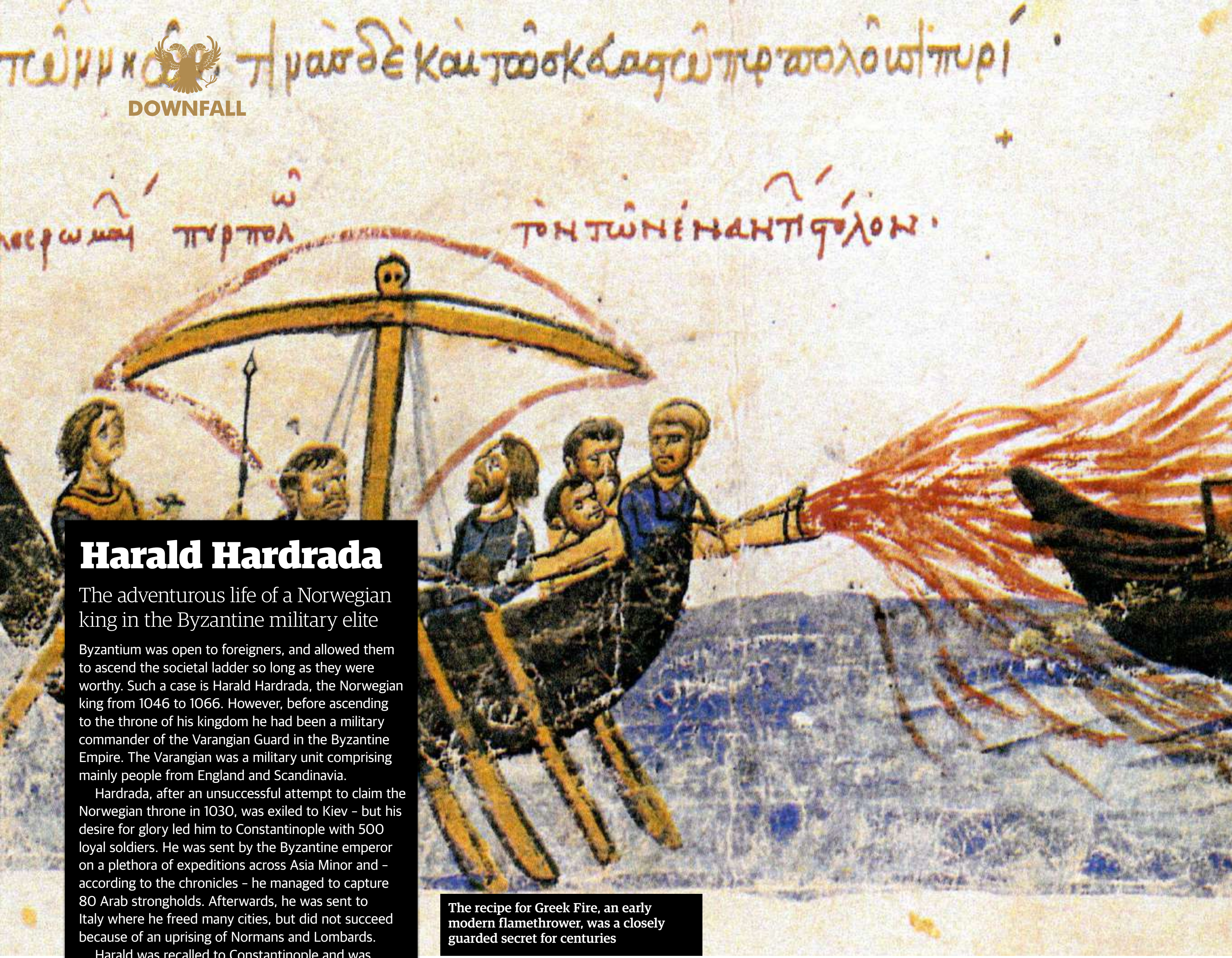


The recipe for Greek Fire, an early modern flamethrower, was a closely guarded secret for centuries

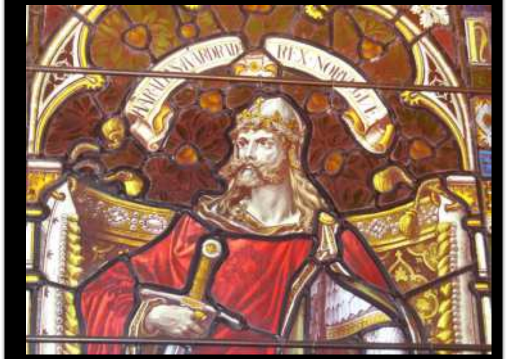
Harald Hardrada

The adventurous life of a Norwegian king in the Byzantine military elite

Byzantium was open to foreigners, and allowed them to ascend the societal ladder so long as they were worthy. Such a case is Harald Hardrada, the Norwegian king from 1046 to 1066. However, before ascending to the throne of his kingdom he had been a military commander of the Varangian Guard in the Byzantine Empire. The Varangian was a military unit comprising mainly people from England and Scandinavia.

Hardrada, after an unsuccessful attempt to claim the Norwegian throne in 1030, was exiled to Kiev – but his desire for glory led him to Constantinople with 500 loyal soldiers. He was sent by the Byzantine emperor on a plethora of expeditions across Asia Minor and – according to the chronicles – he managed to capture 80 Arab strongholds. Afterwards, he was sent to Italy where he freed many cities, but did not succeed because of an uprising of Normans and Lombards.

Harald was recalled to Constantinople and was later imprisoned by the new emperor, but managed to escape. Then, due to the tense political situation, he fled from Constantinople. In 1046 he returned to his motherland where he became king. He had two unsuccessful attempts at taking the Danish and the English thrones. During his expedition in England in 1066, he underestimated the English army and he and his soldiers got obliterated in the battle of Stamford Bridge. According to one chronicle, the brave Viking marched forward, killing a plethora of enemies before being hit by an arrow in his throat. The adventurous life of Harald, along with the Viking Age, was destined to end in Yorkshire.



Harald Hardrada in the Kirkwall Cathedral

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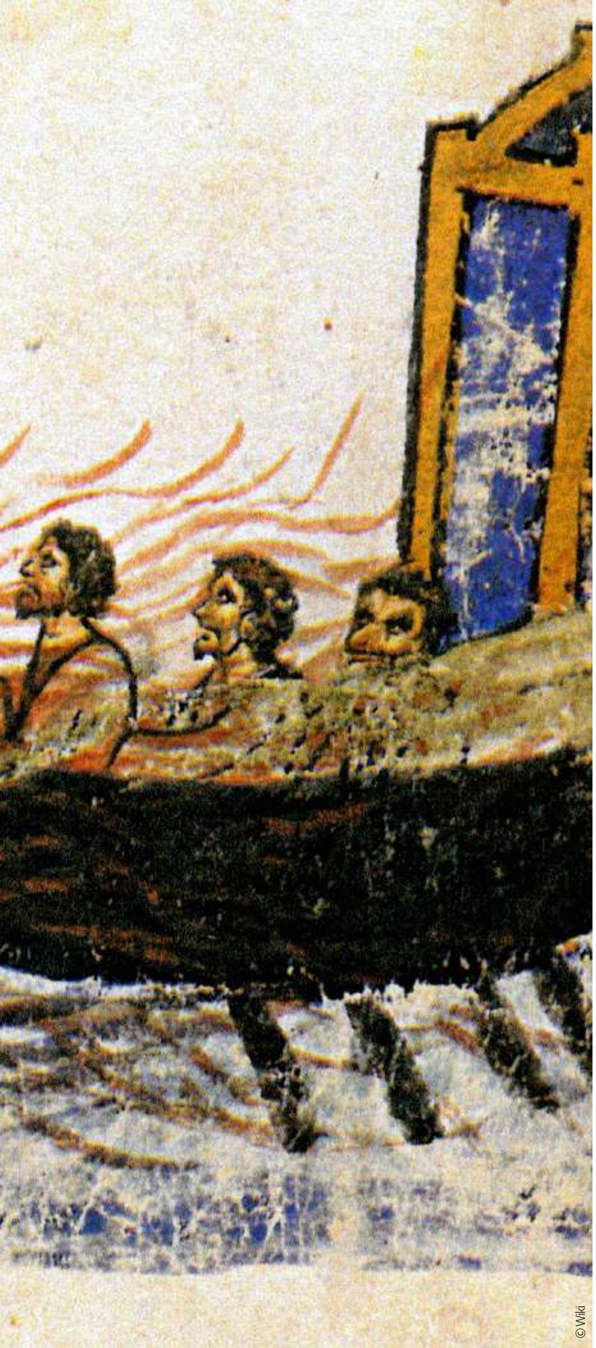
At the same time, he wanted to get married to a Byzantine princess and asked for Greek monks from southern Italy to build monasteries in Germany. The Byzantine influence was gradually increased through imported icons, ivories, jewels and other artworks. A Byzantine monk named Theophilos also wrote a treatise on the art of processing gold, which German goldsmiths used to improve their technique. Another Greek abbot, who later became Pope John XVI, translated the medical treatise of *Celsus* for Otto. After the death of Otto, the Byzantine influence remained prominent in the German court.

In Eastern Europe, one of the greatest Byzantine influences was the dissemination of Christian Orthodoxy to the Slavs. The introduction of Orthodoxy in the Balkans took place in 864, and the Bulgarians were the recipients. The Serbs were the next to join the religion, and today there are seven Slavic states with an Orthodox majority. They all follow the Byzantine Rite, developed in Constantinople. The Rite does not dictate only the way the liturgy is celebrated, but also the church's architecture, vestments, icons, fasting and more aspects of the church life for devout Orthodox Christians. Orthodox fasting is stricter than the Roman Catholic version. Orthodox Christians abstain not only from meat but also from dairy products and on certain days, such as Good Friday, they also avoid oil, fish and wine. Also, every Wednesday and Friday is considered a fasting day, with monasteries adding Monday to the list for good measure.

> Around 200 million people follow the Orthodox religion today. Its name comes from the Greek for right ('orthós') belief ('dóxa')

The Orthodox nations also adopted the Byzantine style of monasticism, the main difference between the Western and the Byzantine ways being that the latter does not have religious orders and is primarily based on mysticism. Furthermore, Eastern monasticism has its own set of rules. Today, Mount Athos – an autonomous monastic region in Greece – is the living continuation of Byzantine monasticism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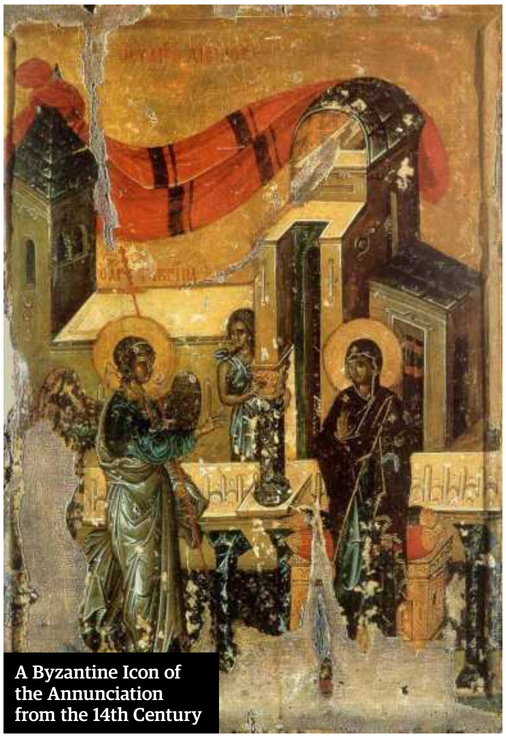
and it accepts visitors who can experience and participate in the daily life of monks. Female presence within Mount Athos, however, is strictly forbidden. Women can only admire the beauty of the monastic lands by boat. For the Orthodox world, the Athos community is known as the Holy Mountain and is considered one of the most important and pious monastic centres in the world.

A Byzantine invention that can be found in most contemporary Eastern Orthodox Churches is the iconostasis. Icons were invented in the Eastern Roman Empire, and they depict holy figures. The iconostasis is a wall-bearing icon, and exists to separate the sanctuary from the nave. Icons are usually made from wood and the techniques used are tempera or encaustic. There are also icons made from metal and ivory, with precious stones to highlight the characteristics of the depicted figures. A visitor to an Orthodox church has the opportunity to take a glimpse of a Byzantine church and – with help from their imagination – they can experience the mystical and fascinating world of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Apart from religion, in the East, the Byzantine Empire was influential in another aspect of daily life – the written word. In 863, two Byzantine missionaries from Thessaloniki, Cyril and Methodius, were sent by Emperor Michael III and Patriarch Photius to Great Moravia, an early Slavic state, to teach them about Christianity, the aim being to convert it into a Christian state that would act as a Byzantine satellite. The two brothers invented the first Slavic alphabet and translated the Bible and other patristic works in order to increase their chances of success. The new alphabet was named Glagolitic and it had 41 characters to match the sounds of the Slavic dialects. Twenty-four of the letters derive from the small Greek alphabet characters, the rest adopted from other languages used for Christian liturgies, such as Coptic and Armenian. The use of the Glagolitic alphabet stopped soon after its creation and was replaced by the Cyrillic alphabet, which was created by the first disciples of the two missionaries and is still in use today in most Slavic countries, such as Russia, and recently became the third official script of the European Union after Latin and Greek. Unintentionally, the two Byzantine brothers played a major role in promoting multilingualism and diversity in Europe. For their contribution to the Slavs, Cyril and Methodius were canonised and are still celebrated throughout the Balkans, even commemorated with a public holiday.

The Byzantine Empire spent 11 centuries disseminating Greek and Roman culture, art and traditions. After the fall of Constantinople, however, that Byzantine influence remained, through both its contribution to the Italian Renaissance and the many inventions and innovations. The history and the greatness of the empire will always be remembered through the small daily things we use that originated there, and through the other major aspects of life, such as law, which have been heavily influenced by the Eastern Roman Empire.

> “The Cyrillic alphabet is still in use today in most Slavic countries, such as Russia, and is the third official script of the EU”


A Byzantine Icon of the Annunciation from the 14th Century

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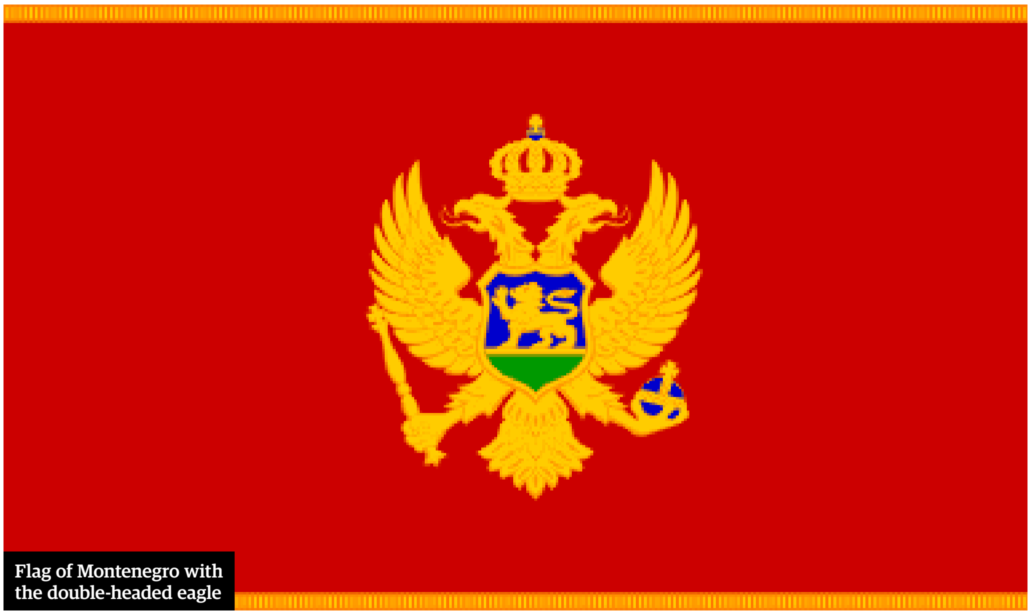
Flag of Montenegro with the double-headed eagle

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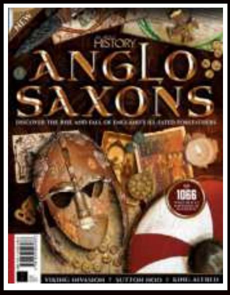
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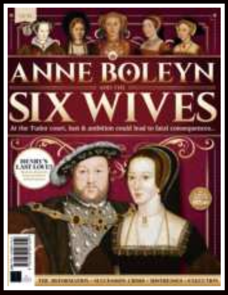
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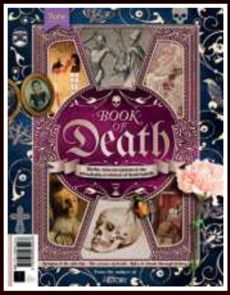
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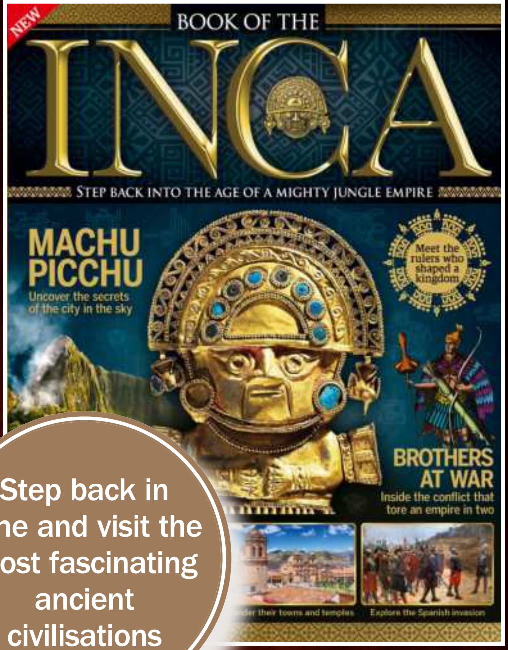
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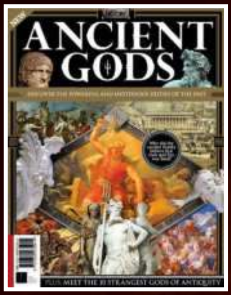
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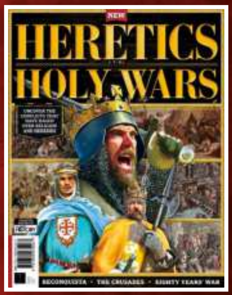
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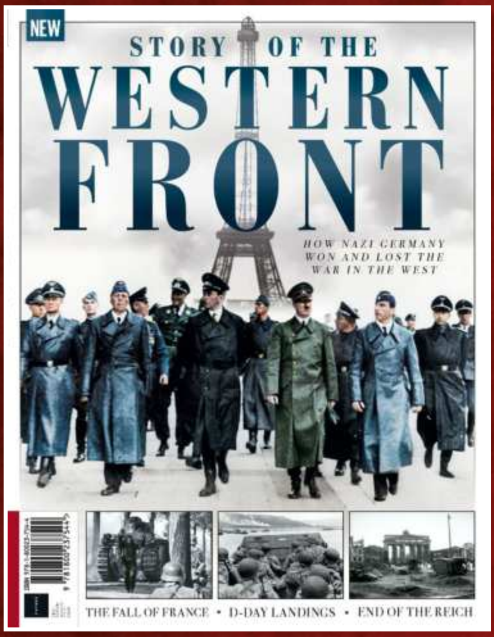
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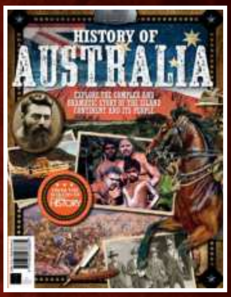
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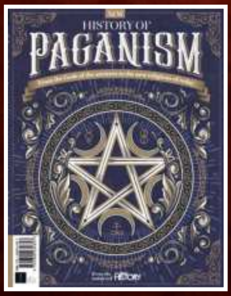
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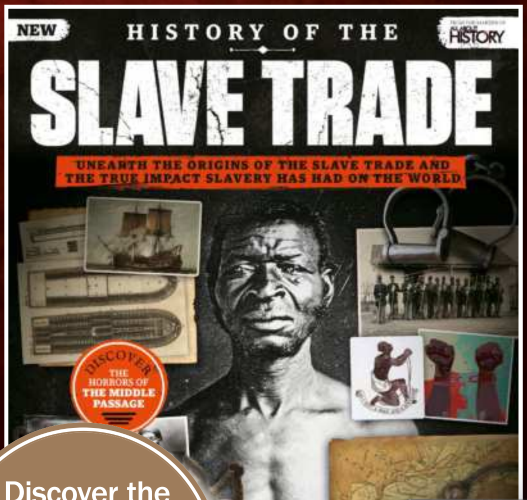
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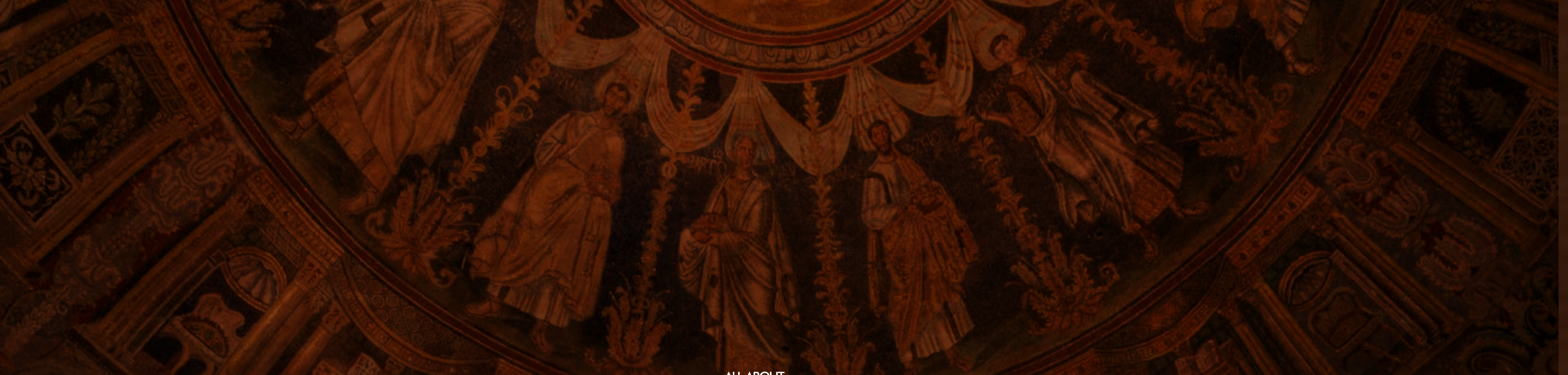

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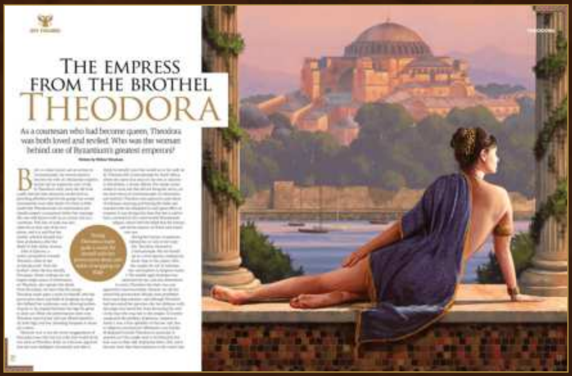

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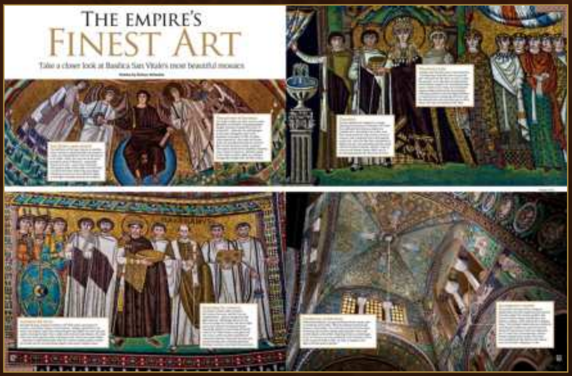

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